Islands in the Sky

The Four-Dimensional Journey of Odysseus through Space and Time

ROSE HAMMOND

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By

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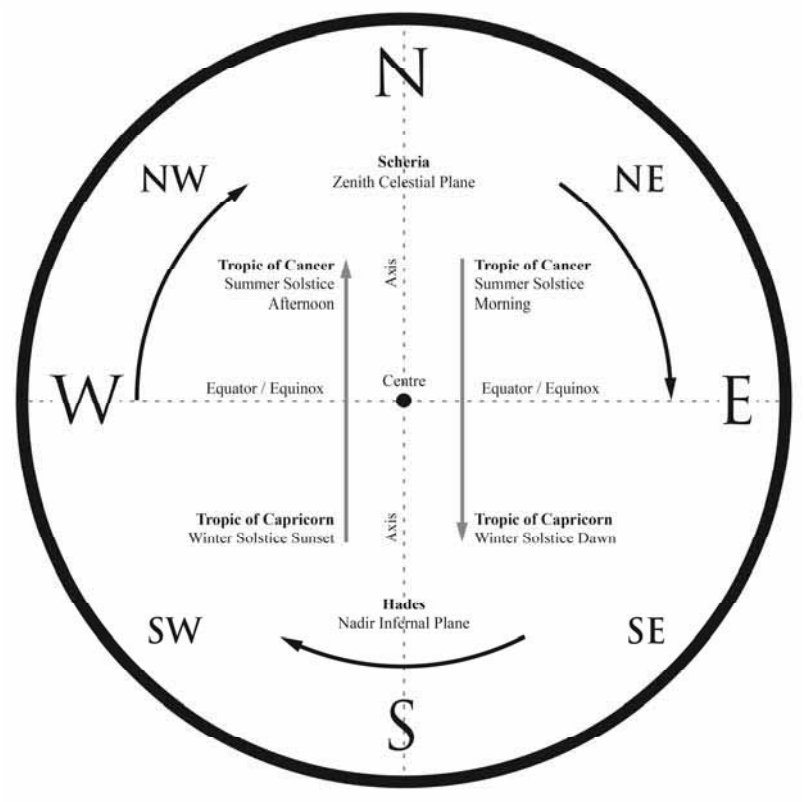
For Peter



The Circular Journey of Odysseus, around the Sun's apparent ecliptic.

> *"We shall prove someday in our Poetical Theology, that Homer disguised this wisdom, as all other wisdoms, under the wandering of his Ulysses."*
> —Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494**).** *Oratio on the Dignity of Man*, 33.

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FOREWORD

This work began as doctoral thesis on Homer's use of symbolism in the *Odyssey*.[1] It very rapidly outgrew its brief, for the realisation grew that no ancient symbol can be exclusively confined to any of the modern academic disciplines as we know them. Unfortunately for those who like their answers to be cut and dried, major symbols have the elusive potential to be universal, cross-cultural and timeless entities bound by a shadowy core meaning. They may raise their heads as verbal metaphors or graphic images in fields of study currently classified as mythology or religion, in cult or ritual, art or archaeology, philosophy or sky sciences, and above all, in the sacred geometry of successive generations.[2] Accordingly I apologise in advance to any reader who embarks on these pages in the anticipation of a traditionally focused interpretation of the Homeric text. The book is primarily a study in iconography which requires the use of a quite different methodological approach.

Also, since recent research in Greek oral tradition has made clear that some at least of the poet's source material must belong to the prehistory of the Mediterranean basin, and even more distant lands, it seems valid to draw on those wider sources, particularly their surviving belief systems and their encoded imagery.

The spirit of those seemingly impenetrable centuries which have not bequeathed us any decipherable texts may be traced through their most pervasive remaining symbols. To those students of Homer who have struggled valiantly to make sense of the course and purpose of Odysseus' journey I offer the idea that despite the ephemeral nature of universal symbolism, another logical explanation can be grafted on to the well-loved stories. It will be shown as one which adds immeasurably to the status of the poet as the earliest known student of the mystical cosmos in the western world

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PREFACE

Odysseus' dangerous trials and adventures are famously played out across a "wine-dark sea". The ancient metaphor teases the mind with a sense of something dimly understood and yet perversely illogical. So in view of the essential difficulties of the phrase, let us begin by indulging the 'symbolic imagination', and consider that the poet may be referring not to the kind of salty ocean with which most are familiar but to some part of the cosmic night which frames our world, the dark and fathomless sky experienced by all. Were that to be the case, then the maritime islands of the *Odyssey* would have to be sought among the stars or planets which embroider the darkness, and Odysseus' journey would resemble that of a shamanic visionary on a spiritual journey into deep space in search of some otherwordly Ithakan paradise; what is more, it may emerge that the many difficulties of direction and orientation which beset the hero (and at times, the poet's readers) could be resolved by the inclusion of this three-dimensional backdrop to the Homeric universe. This is but one of the challenging issues to be addressed in this book and perhaps the most fundamental. But first the reader will need to know the basis upon which such a controversial claim can be made, even tentatively, and the methods by which it may be substantiated.

Finding the Landscape

Homer's mythic territory has long perplexed the poet's readers. It relates frequently enough to the geographical world with its naming of Ionian and Aegean islands, but does not with any visible logic provide a satisfying itinerary for the hero on his wandering Adventures. Perhaps the magical and folkloric episodes should warn us that the epic landscape consists of something more than the geographical terrain of the eastern Mediterranean in the late Bronze Age. If, as many have speculated, there is an inherent philosophy or spiritual doctrine hidden within these robust escapades of seafaring men, the content would not be revealed indiscriminately to one and all; it would more likely be encoded or conveyed by subtle allusion, much as the Pythagoreans employed passwords amongst themselves to signal their membership of a select

brotherhood, and the Eleusian *mystes* protected their rites by the most rigorous secrecy.

Shamanism versus 'Science'

These thoughts were not arrived at lightly, but they have been encouraged by the knowledge that Homer as an allegorist was not an unfamiliar idea in the classical centuries, and more recently, that the work of the Structuralist school of interpreters has begun to unravel thematic 'bundles' which can be read as a symbolic discourse having a particularly sophisticated inner language. Yet few have used such methods to plumb the cosmological content of either epic. For most Homerists, there is currently little or no true cosmic reference in the epics as we have received them. Agreed, the poet says little of note which is capable of being read as 'science', from the perspective of our modern understanding of the workings of the universe, nor is very much said of the skies that the poet would have been able to see in his own time. But the epics are redolent with shamanist imagery, and this has a strong cosmological content which cannot be ignored. In such an ancient and universal phenomenon, perhaps the oldest of our religions, man found ritual and symbolic means to create an imagined link with the divine forces lying distantly from his own world, deities lodging so far away that some definition of space was necessary to anyone wishing to bestride the worlds. For the shaman, as for most men of religion before and since, divinity, the One, or creative principle, lies far out in space and beyond the physical reach of man. Although the physical body may be constrained, the seeker may travel ritually on a journey to the gods in spirit if not in body, commonly by the mimetic climbing of a tree and a subsequent 'falling back' to Earth. The entire ritual would be conducted ecstatically in a state of deliberately altered consciousness achieved by chanting, drumming, or ingestion of hallucinogenic materials. The shaman does not consider himself earthbound, for the earth-plane is only the start-point of his transformative experience; and since the imagination is unbounded, he voyages as far as his mind and spirit allow him to reach.

Once our poet or any other man of imagination has set aside the two dimensions of a flat Earth (or even the three of a spherical globe) in favour of three dimensions extending into space, he creates a multi-dimensional field of action offering enormous flexibility of movement to the landscape of his fictional world. The totality of three dimensions is capable of containing either a flat, or a spherical earth-form, plus space itself; and the inclusion of certain stellar and planetary movements (which indicate the

passage of time) will endow those directions with an important fourth dimension. That is not to say that all Homeric terrestrial geography can be ignored. But an extension of direction into space will certainly help to resolve certain puzzling issues. The world as conceived and explored by the early shaman goes far in providing the images we need to interpret Homer at a radical new level.

Early Man

The newer sciences of anthropology and ethnology have enabled us to understand approximately how early man must have found and maintained his place on this uncertain planet of ours. Using his own physical being as his central point of reference to the phenomenal world, he will have learned the north, south, east and west of his universe through his mastery and exploitation of its fruitful but sometimes dangerous landscapes, thinking largely by analogy and linking an imagined like with like. This much we can presuppose from studies of world societies which have preserved their ancient beliefs, and also from the ways in which our own children learn to make sense of the world around them. From his observations of harmonious living in the natural world, its 'right order' and especially its determinative rules concerning death and renewal, man appears to have found a means of ensuring his own security by domestic replication of the predominant patterns of the cosmos. We inherit from our ancestor the instinctive knowledge that life is followed by death just as sunset follows sunrise and winter follows summer, and that plants live and die but are reborn from the womb of the nourishing Earth just as a baby is nourished in the womb of its mother. Like the plants and animals, we need shelter, warmth and food, and once we have learned to harvest or cultivate, our own lives must, if they are to be long and fruitful, move strictly to the tempo dictated by the seasons. This rhythm imposes a pattern which is the universal pattern of order, or 'right-running' as we shall sometimes name it here, by which the universe regulates its affairs.[3] The original Greek meaning of '*kosmos*' was 'order'; only subsequently did it become a word for the visible outer world. Man found in the predictable stellar and planetary motions in the skies a measure of the passing of time, and deduced its relevance to weather and climate; from such knowledge, he was able to draw practical instruction on how he could best regulate his husbandry, secure the lives of his family and increase his wealth. As a secondary benefit, human life conducted under the protection of the great forces that resided high above must lend itself to a comforting sense of divine protection. Gradually the same patterning began to provide a model

for the elaboration of man's spiritual life and his self-aware assessment of his place in the wider scheme of things. We are able to suppose, in part, the substance of these facts from archaeological evidence of solar and stellar alignment of prestige buildings, where ritual artefacts bearing cosmic referents have also been found. By such tokens, the skies are shown to have been enormously powerful and relevant to the life of man. The material finds also testify to man's need to imitate and replicate the laws of the visible world for the benefit of himself or his own small community, or in the case of a ruler, for the well-being of a community. In this way the visible stars and planets readily became 'gods' whose favour was sought by an outward- and upward-looking ancient society.

Methodologies

The shamanic belief in a cosmic connection which is a 'non-scientific' but (for its time, a perfectly practical *modus vivendi*) led to practices we should today consider quite fallacious.[4] We would probably consider from this distance that such a philosophy was ill-founded since it was based on inadequate knowledge, and that its development was ever-flawed by circularity in reasoning. The reading of bird omens, for example, or the interpretation of dreams as divine revelation, or the study of weather patterns as portents of divine activity which we meet in the verses of Homer have small place in the present world, yet they must have arisen on the back of some relevant experience of self-validating cause and effect. No educated individual can now believe in the power of a plant to cure human ills purely on the basis of a leaf pattern suggestive of a part of the human anatomy, yet the mediaeval mind did so until very few centuries ago. And if we were to suggest that a dream portends a particular event, the psychologist would be quick to point out the subjective bias of our subconscious mind. Nevertheless we barely resist the pull of old beliefs concerning lucky cats and unlucky ladders, crossed fingers and 'touch wood', which hark back to the so-called superstitious practices of our forebears. Full rationality (based on hypothesis, observation, testing and deduction) would seem to be a relatively recent acquisition in man's developmental history. For millennia it has been preceded by a system which used largely concrete symbols to express the elusive nature of abstractions, to the apparent satisfaction of those struggling to grasp the nature of the unknowable. The advantage of a substitute symbol or a narrative myth was that it provided pre-literate man with a language in which abstractions could be tested and brought into meaningful contexts. This is the system that can be traced from at least the first Christian

millennium until the Renaissance, and, one suspects, even after, though increasingly in tandem with the developing sciences as we know them. It is also the only system available to us for penetrating the more arcane reaches of Homeric thought.

Unpicking the Symbol

If we neglect the basic process of symbolic thought and deeper contexts, the result is readings which delve no further than the material or literal sense of a text or image.[5] Yet most literary critics and historians of art would recognise that no reader can experience a poem or a painting to the full without assuming a whole level of fuller meaning awaiting discovery beneath the surface imagery. To this end, and ideally, we should all like to understand the writer or artist in his own time, his own culture and his own developed personality. We credit Homer with a wide range of poetic expertise but due to the lack of information about his world we have not fully appreciated the depth of his gift in the context of the earliest religions and their mode of expression. If that context employed elaborate symbolism, this is where we must go to find the full scale of allusions contained within the text.

Our present hypothesis is based on recent scholarship (particularly the work of Mircea Eliade and his colleagues) which suggests that the ancient writer or the performer of songs belonged to a culture which was highly conscious of the magic and mystery of the universe. That consciousness acknowledged a supreme power, source of an inspired Unity (the 'One') *fons et origo* of our own existence. It is imagined that the One self-generates to bring the Two into being, and from there the whole of manifest creation unfolds and multiplies without ever losing its essential and original Oneness. The same longing for knowledge of our origins is still for many the essence of their religious belief; but how is Man to describe and depict such an awesome concept, even in a literate age, let alone one that had no such skills?

In any civilisation considering Creation to be an integrated whole, where the Creator is omnipresent (transcendent and immanent), the literal meaning of a word or image or the substance of the material, sensory world of experience is not inevitably separated from the esoteric. The latter is by its nature amorphous, and in many systems not to be discussed.That is not to say that the Greeks of the pre-Homeric age did not make some highly tenuous connections (such as the reading of omens) which would find no place in our philosophy.

Equally there is a well-observed tendency among less developed traditional societies to associate cause and effect in ways that we should consider quite unjustified. Speaking in the idiom of his time in a book entitled *How Natives Think*, Levy-Bruhl[6] commented on the habit among "primitives" of associating consecutive events with an antecedent, then placing their trust in the fallacious 'connectedness' of the two. There was apparently no such thing as 'chance' in these societies, only parts of a whole. The example is certainly extreme (from the point of view of Homeric researches) but may act as a counterweight to any assumption we moderns may make concerning the maturity of prehistoric thought in early Greece.

Reliance on such imperfect thought systems leads inevitably to circular arguments. How, then, are we to validate any ancient system of thought, and how can any modern reader be persuaded that a common object may carry a secondary, metaphysical meaning, and that this meaning is identifiable in a particular narrative? The solution demands the application of ancient methodologies (if one may use such an anomalous term) to the solution of ancient problems. Because myth is an infinitely complex system speaking in many voices and using both abstractions and concrete imagery which it twists and weaves and overlaps whilst it entertains and informs, it is not easily reduced to a mere narrative. But it is the upper narrative which stays in the mind, and by its dramatic impact ensures that memory will knowingly or unknowingly preserve the less tangible inner content. Some early philosophers were able to identify the problem: Pausanias registered his personal doubts, and his honest retraction of them, in the course of his *Guide to Greece*: "When I began to write my history I thought these Greek stories were rather silly, but now… I have decided to treat them from the point of view that the famous Greek wise men told their stories in riddles and not out of stupidity… So in religious matters this is the principle we shall follow."[7]

A myth ('story') is an encoded message, Pausanias implies, and a puzzle to be unravelled; this puzzle was not a casual formulation by ignorant or superstitious men, but a system of choice for wise and thoughtful Greek ancestors.

Testing the Theory

Whatever method is used to interpret a subtext of the *Odyssey* or any other work of literature, there must come a point when the sum total of the deductions either convinces or it does not. In other words, to succeed in meeting acceptable criteria in this twenty-first century, the final

interpretation must regularly achieve a logical balance and integrity. After an intuitive stage of intelligence-gathering the critical iconographer will proceed to test his conclusions as hypotheses; the frequency and strength of these theories ('positive readings') will then have to be evaluated for their consistency and relevance to a broader theme if they are not ultimately to show themselves as false positives. The bigger picture should emerge from a concatenation of smaller images relevant to the whole, in which a few erroneous interpretations may arise but will be negated by the greater force of those correct assumptions which support a final, coherent theory.

Iconographers or 'symbologists' undertake to relate a given image, (in an artistic medium, in written or memorised form) to the wider context of the society which has formulated it, or to the overall content of a larger creative undertaking. It will be appreciated that such scholars are on particularly hazardous ground when embarking on the unpicking of a symbolic mode of discourse. One man's reading may differ widely from another's. This has inevitably led to some sharp criticism of the methods and conclusions of practitioners of the art. The scholarship of Mircea Eliade, who was a leading interpreter of pattern in religious symbols, has typically been challenged as unsystematic, overly subjective and lacking scholarly rigour. He is not alone. Much of Eliade's inspiration came from the work of the Traditionalist School of 'Perennial Philosophy' formulated in the first half of the twentieth century, whose major luminaries, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and René Guénon, had to argue forcibly for an approach to ancient literature and iconography that took account of circular but consistent modes of thinking which, they reasoned, informed the ancient and mediaeval representations of the physical world and man's place in it. 'Traditional' science (as they named it) is quite distinct from modern 'profane' practice. In relying on reason alone, they argue, this material world of ours has fallen into error and decay; religion has become a thing apart, instead of the very core of our existence. Symbolism is the method best adapted to the teaching of higher truths and the ancients knew this far better than we, they claim.

Multi-layered Texts

Eliade and other such iconographers of his time have rightly, in my view, argued that internal elements of a symbol-system are interactively self-supporting and can be read at multiple levels. A few examples will help to clarify what it means to 'read' the pictorial image or literary conceit. The first is taken from a text familiar to Western readers, the

Gospel of St. Matthew, where Jesus narrates a series of parables concerning the pursuit of truth. One story tells how a man finds a treasure in a field and being joyful at his good fortune, sells all that he has to buy the field (Matthew 13, 44). At the literal level, this is a mini-narrative complete in itself, comprehensible to the simplest of listeners and totally memorable. Like a seed planted in the ground in another parable, the inner message may one day bear fruit in the 'heart' (soul, spirit) of the man who hears it. To those of greater sensitivity or education, the story will immediately reveal itself as an allegory, that is, a sustained metaphor; and although such a technical term may not occur to the listener the message will flower under its own momentum. The inner sense contains the mystical or anagogical level. At this point the true value of 'man', 'field', 'treasure', 'purchase' will unfold, we may say, to those that have "ears to hear", as Matthew observes in verse 43 of the same chapter. The man is the soul; the treasure is Heaven, or the word of God, or paradise; the field is this existence; the purchase is the sacrifice to be made for the greater good of the soul.

In verses (45-46) of the same book the Evangelist tells the story of "the pearl of great price" which has much the same structure as the earlier parable, with the difference that a merchant is not discovering but "seeking" the fine pearl which represents, we are told, "the kingdom of Heaven". Again, the pearl once found is bought at the price of all else that the seeker currently owns. These tiny narratives encapsulate certain abstractions: relative worth, unflinching endeavour, and self-sacrifice. The enquirer who is willing to make further inter-cultural researches into the inner sense of the resplendent pearl will find that the pure integrity of the prize to be gained (the 'pearl in the oyster') is universally converted into a symbol of life, divinity, and rebirth.[8] One might be surprised to learn that such values are associated with the simple product of a grain of sand embedded in a mollusc found in the muddy depths of sea or river, until one brings together (first imaginatively and then rationally) the associations of light and brightness with the rarity and purity of the godhead, the contrast between underwater darkness and airy brilliance, and the timeless effort which the humble oyster makes in creating a thing of great beauty. All these and more can be recognised by any man or woman with a developed sense of wonder.

Here is an example of associative thinking based on observation which we can readily share with our untutored predecessors. Where the associations are clear, as in the above examples, none I think will deny the validity of a 'comparative symbolism', which unlike its related disciplines, comparative religion or mythology, is founded on verifiable and concrete

universals: the shape, size and colour of life-forms, their growth and behaviour, which man observes and interprets using cognitive processes common to every member of the human race. With all this in mind, the reader will more easily grasp the sensitivity of peoples of the world who have variously treated the pearl as an active agent of resurrection in the Afterlife, by sewing pearls on grave clothes or placing them in coffins, or in body orifices, for example (a practice attested in India, Borneo, Laos, Mexico, Florida) or that from its resemblance to the Moon or a foetus in the shell-womb, the pearl has been used in Hindu medicine for its life-giving principle, if not consistently effective properties. The same lunar and biological parallels associate the pearl and its host (the bipartite 'vulva' of the oyster shell) with notions of love and conception, while the very same associations determine its use as a reputed aphrodisiac, a development which further identifies the sea shell as the celebrated birth place of Venus or Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Gradually through all these symbolic linkages the pearl came to represent all that is finest in the universe, the mystery of the transcendent made manifest, or even the mystic Centre from which life emanates.

These examples reveal that although the symbol may be clad in physical form it inevitably gathers a multitude of thoughts and associations around it. It may for that reason become an object for meditation, at which time its emergent meanings may be idiosyncratically personal to the beholder but in no way less valid. On a broader front the symbol may take on an external cultural life of its own as, for example, an element in myth (story telling) or ritual (a focus of worship) or magic (an amulet or talisman). The categories converse and interact with each other in a highly complex language of endlessly replicating referents.

Before and After Homer

This allegorising, interpretative system reflects the style in which the early Christian Fathers and later mediaeval exegetes interpreted the scriptures in Western Europe for the education of the faithful. From the first centuries of the early Church until the Reformation, an unbroken tradition explained the Old and New Testaments in terms of a single coherent revelation. So confident was the Church that it possessed the scriptural testimony of the one true God, that the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the coming of the Messiah were considered totally validated by the birth of Christ; and the coming of Christ likewise validated the prophecies of Isaiah. No anxieties therefore about the circular argument

among these early scholastics. In fact, circularity provided total vindication.

Proof will be needed that such thinking was not a purely Christian development but had its roots in the more ancient world. So, information is offered that the same process can be seen in the dense metaphoric language of the *Vedas* and the cryptic language of Near Eastern prayers and hymns. But one can do no better in the search for ancient models than to turn to the Egypt of the Pharaohs, whose civilisation flourished well before the classical period in Greece and even before the Abrahamic religions came to prominence in the Near East. As early as the third millennium BCE the Egyptians were using a form of hieroglyphic writing, constructing astronomically-aligned temples and pyramids, and adorning their buildings with complex figures which had a material or sensory value as animals, birds, ornaments, tools, buildings or furniture. Today we are relatively well informed about this culture since the translation of hieroglyphs has now opened up the meaning and purpose of the symbols which adorn the surviving monuments, of which there are many. What has been revealed is the value of the separate object within a schema, where each appears initially as itself, but metaphorically and predominantly by an association of ideas as the expression of a wider principle or an ideal form. Unless the assemblage is read as a whole the value of the units is negligible. But once read, the 'essence' can be seen as informing every part of the whole.

Egyptian culture was deeply imbued with awareness of a spiritual presence which flowed from above. At moments when there was a particular need to channel this power, the *djed* pillar decorated as a tree or staff or human spinal column would be raised in ritual confirmation of the vertical connection between sky and land. This imagined downward flow permeated all forms of things seen below: men, animals, landscapes, even buildings. One may speak of a ritually-enforced enhancement of the transcendent-immanent condition of the universe, in which all that is 'below' is informed by the power from 'above' in which it partakes. Awareness of this unifying vertical dimension had the advantage of giving man a sense of identity with his surroundings, which he experienced both in their material and non-physical aspects, that is, in their transcendent values. The divine source could be known through the object, since all was one. This concept of an integrated world, defined by 'Oneness', nurtures a system which has particular relevance to the unravelling of Homeric metaphor, as we shall see.

Also in the third millennium, the neighbouring Babylonians were developing a divinatory system that interpreted the 'signs' in the Heavens

in relation to events on Earth; this was the beginning of a system we would today call, rather deprecatingly, astrology, but no such distinction was made between astrology and astronomy until the sixteenth century of our era. The process of 'reading the signs' rested on the proposition that everything in the universe related to some other aspect or happening. However small, every event would find a correlate elsewhere. Once the connections between astral phenomena and earthly events had been made (mystically or empirically) they would be codified for future reference. At first, the sought-for signs which were found among the celestial bodies, the winds, or the weather, chiefly concerned the welfare of the king and the state he ruled. Yet as a result of the intense effort invested in understanding 'the will of the gods', astronomers of the East acquired a set of tables and unbroken records that eventually served as the foundation of a mathematically-accurate understanding of planetary movements. In short, 'magic' finally became 'science', but not until long after the Homeric age.

'Deciphering' Homer

The aim of this work is to show that Homer, also, was operating a symbol system or implying truths perhaps too rich or portentous to be revealed directly to men of lesser understanding (without "ears to hear"). The task involves drawing out or decoding another consistent layer of meaning from the familiar narrative. A challenge was long ago offered by those Hellenistic allegorists of later centuries who certainly thought they had found evidence of one or more subtexts in the Homeric corpus. But here in the current unravelling the focus is upon identifying and describing those symbolic utterances most securely rooted in the text. Ideally, those hidden elements should extend and support the wider thematic development of the work or, in the language of code makers and breakers, the surface narrative which acts as the uncoded, coherent message *en clair* must be broken and reconstructed to show a secondary meaning. Once successfully deciphered, of course, the coded and uncoded alike are revealed as separate but complementary modes of the same message. Only when the subtext has gained a level of coherence equal to the logic of the upper level will it be possible to claim that the message is finally unravelled. This is the ambitious undertaking that the present writer has set as a goal.

A Common Denominator

Where there are notable ambiguities or gaps in evidence, or even when none is apparent, one would always wish for a stabilising, shared element which might serve as a yardstick or supporting framework, and since this study deals with heroic adventures in a cosmological setting this reference point must also be cosmic in nature. It is fortunate that there is such a system in place and fully documented, and one moreover that has been found within every major culture from at least the third millennium BCE, and still endures to this day. This is the shaman's imagined projection of a link to Heaven, an *axis mundi,* which can be reproduced at any place and at any time, by ritual means or by re-valorisation of simple domestic structures such as the pillar, column or kingpost of the house, the ceremonial *djed* mentioned earlier, a totem pole, or a tree post cut from a sacred glade.[9] Within the same scheme, domestic hearths or altars for burnt sacrifice become the symbolic points of penetration ('*omphaloi'*) of the Earth's surface by 'the axis of smoke' which unites Earth to Heaven and mankind to the gods. This is not to be confused with the central axis of the Earth's rotation which is a geographic convenience with little or no metaphoric value. (The idealised *axis* is here italicised; the geographical polar axis is not).

We know the symbolic *axis* as the Tree of Life, the World Axis or World Pillar and central component of a geometric figure which defines the *imago mundi*, our world picture. Man's place in the cosmos can just as easily be defined in simple symbolism by the use of a vertical object such as a rod, spear or column pointing to the zenith of the skies from a horizontal line defining his plane of existence, the Earth; while the combined vertical and horizontal projections establish at their intersection the centre of his being. From this ('omphalic') centre he will imaginatively project the four directions of space which define his world's cardinal limits and maintain its stability. Vertical and horizontal are safely contained within the circle which binds the whole and defines the limits of his experience in the same way that the curve of the horizon shows where Earth ends and meets the sky. In a version found in Finnish folklore, a 'nail' fastens the vertical *axis* to the high point of the starry firmament in the 'inverted bowl' of the upper hemisphere, whilst a mountain serves as marker to the stabilising point of the *axis* where it roots in the navel of the Earth (figure P-1). By applying to the epic's symbolism the most general qualities attributed to the communicative *axis* and receptive *omphalos* (power, fertility, justice, eternal life, etc., all divinely inspired and gifted) we shall acquire a reference tool invaluable to the decipherment of some

of the more cryptic Homeric utterances. The *axis* will be seen to guide the heroic adventurer far out into space to points of transformation which will reveal far more to him about the rules of living and dying than he would ever learn on Earth. To acquire immortality or even a second or third chance to live again in this archaic world, the departing soul of man follows the apparent path of the Sun towards the source of life itself. And nothing could be more natural than to imagine that life after death will be conducted in a realm which is a romanticised, wish-fulfilling image of the known terrestrial world, or its mirror image in the case of the lower infernal realms; that it will have similar social structures, prohibitions and *mores*, an identical awareness of natural cycles and celestial phenomena, the same geography of mountains, rivers, islands and seas. At times it will be difficult to determine whether our hero is present in this world or another, but perhaps in the archaic mind the two were co-existent and inseparable.

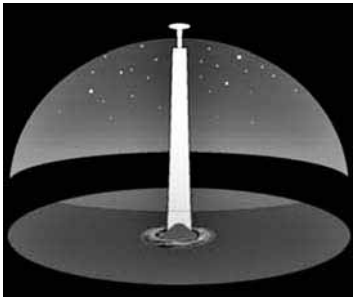

Figure P-1

Cosmology in Pre-History

It has to be admitted that a journey made in the footsteps of Odysseus will take us along a myriad of wandering paths, but there are definite junction points where the story may lead in more than one direction, and so it should, since the ancient reality of our worldview was a vast interconnectedness. Nowadays we speak of the Gaia principle as if it were a contemporary discovery, but our ancestors knew only too well the dangers of neglecting their environment, hence for them the granting of due honour to the controlling climactic powers was an important part of maintaining the fragile balance of life. From the positions and phases of

the Sun, Moon and stars, men learnt when to plant, to harvest and to fish safely, for these were visible seasonal markers ingrained in folk memory, fit to guide the farmer and sailor through the agricultural year. To neglect the stellar calendar was to risk drought, flooding or stormy weather and to put long-term survival at risk, so the sky-watching that led in time to apparently fanciful myth-making was at its inception a serious matter of maintaining harmony between upper and lower worlds.

Unfortunately for those dependent upon it, the source of that harmonious balance (the firmament with all its mighty shining, circling bodies) has through history proved vulnerable to cyclic cosmic upheaval impacting upon the Earth, inevitably with disastrous consequences. Fire, flood and massive loss of life attend each new World Age as the world shifts (or 'precesses') on its polar axis: all the more reason, to the archaic mind, to strengthen and renew the power of the replicating *axis* by exhibiting, raising, adorning and worshipping a pole or column, temple or ziggurat, or the priestly personage who channels such down-flowing powers through his spinal column. Meanwhile, there was no more valuable activity for men of practical intelligence than to measure and anticipate changes in the sky, to record what was witnessed, to take magical or ritual measures to divert potential disaster and to hand on that knowledge to future generations in a coded language accessible to those of their own kind, those who needed to know and knew how to see.

This is the substance of the cosmic imagery of the *Odyssey* and perhaps too of the *Iliad*.[10] The question of whether Homer invented his own code or inherited it from formulaic material I leave to those better qualified to analyse the linguistic inheritance, but this is to be emphasised: it is in the mentality of the poet (of any century) to grasp instinctively the inner sense of an image and to re-shape and enhance it for future generations. Great visionary poets such as Virgil, Dante, Milton, Blake, and in recent times, James Joyce and T. S. Eliot, are but a few who have used the cosmos as the metaphor par excellence for the spiritual life of man, and surely Homer is no exception, nor Plato, for although not a poet he too found in cosmic myth an ideal medium for the transmission of his philosophy. He and the other poets mentioned in this paragraph have all drawn inspiration from the *Odyssey* for their own renderings of a journey which is more in the nature of a soul-journey than a (relatively) shallow voyage of adventure.

I have tried to present the material under clear headings in order to guide the reader through some extremely challenging concepts, but inevitably there will be some overlapping and repetition. This is not intentional, but it is in the nature of the material that it is applicable to

more than one circumstance. Repetition has the added advantages of highlighting important points of convergence and testing them both accumulatively and in multiple contexts. If a false connection is made it will not stand up to the competing claims of those others which are buttressed by multiple instances, some of which may prove to be fundamental and universal principles; the 'false' or 'weak' interpretation will eventually be elbowed out by better-supported readings. In pursuing this unconventional approach to the symbolism of Homer I have allowed the material itself to give the lead; the cosmological implications have not been imposed on the text (for they are implications which I was at first poorly qualified to understand and would have greatly preferred not to find), on the contrary, they were forced upon me by the implications of the more cryptic and elliptical of Homer's "great signs", such as the oar, the tree, and the pillar; from there the process found its own momentum. Just as the sculptor is said to 'find' his finished work in the rough stone of his beginnings, Homer's cosmology has been permitted here to reveal itself from within the text, with the minimum of deliberate shaping. The reader is accordingly invited to join in this exceptional voyage, and if at times an assertion strains his credulity, he is politely advised to delay judgment until he sees where a putative theory may safely lead. Proof is not in the detail but in the totality and the final coming together of many stray threads.

Notes

[1] *Cosmological Themes and Motifs in the Odyssey of Homer with some Antecedents in Minoan and Mycenean Iconography*. Dept. of Classical Studies, Open University (UK) 2007.
[2] Lawlor (1982).
[3] Worthen (1992).
[4] Guénon (1995) pp. 304ff.
[5] Eliade (1965).
[6] Levi-Bruhl (1926) p. 73.
[7] Pausanias, 8.8.3.
[8] Eliade (1991) pp. 144-150.
[9] Eliade (1987) pp. 20f.
[10] Wood and Wood (1999, 2010).

PART ONE:

FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER ONE

PSYCHE, SOUL AND AFTERLIFE, SOUL AND COSMOS

Homer does not favour his audience with a full, direct expression of his philosophy concerning the end of man's life, nor indeed does he offer any clear expectation for continued existence beyond the frontier of death. It is not necessarily that he had none; quite possibly he chose to express such ideas in a guarded form. To keep the secret of a mystery whilst sharing it obliquely with other initiates seems very much in accord with the known history of such movements; for sure, the skills required for such an undertaking were certainly not beyond the powers of our poet, nor does he leave us bereft of clues. Certain objects are imbued with an extra-ordinary significance, and certain personalities betray remarkable powers that have to be unearthed from scant or indirect information. But for all we know, the trail of clues may have stood out with greater clarity for the people of Homer's own time and culture.

Significant Objects

The *Odyssey* contains four instances where the poet points to specific objects and tells his reader in quite unequivocal terms, this is a sign, *sema,* or even a great sign, *mega sema*. In the *Iliad*, a great sign was highlighted in the second book (308-330) as a portent of Troy's destruction after ten years of fighting. It involved a snake emerging from beneath an altar by a spring and making its way to a plane tree where a mother bird has housed her eight 'children'. The snake consumes first the nestlings then the mother herself. Kalchas interprets the sign as a portent of victory and the conquest of Troy in the tenth year of conflict, and all comes to pass as he has foreseen. Unfortunately there is not always a Kalchas to hand to clarify the sense of the sign, so we must fall back on our own resources when it comes to unravelling them. Clearly this example draws to some extent on number symbolism, but there are further resonances in the form of the snake ('Earth powers') the nurturing tree ('Tree of Life') and the altar by the spring, where water emerges from an aperture ('*omphalos*',

and point of access to the fertilising powers of the god). Another, the 'sign' of the turning point in the chariot race, "a dry stump" described to his son by Nestor, the wise old campaigner (*Iliad* 23, 304-348) brings into play a wider semantic field where *sema* (331) has the additional sense of a tomb or tomb-marker, the 'sign' by which the grave of a hero is marked and known, as well as a token of transfer from life to death. Here is an indication that whatever the inner sense of each individual *sema,* further metaphysical content is a possibility. The inner development is there if we care to reflect upon some apparently superfluous detail which is nothing of the kind: the two white stones said to lean against it, "at the joining place of the ways" (329f.). Exactly what these stones indicate and the "ways" they record will become apparent when we dig deeper into Homer's vision of 'last things' and his roads into the Afterlife.

In the *Odyssey*, some significant *semata,* "very clear proofs", relate to the great bed of Odysseus which was supported by an olive tree (23, 181-206). There is also the prophecy of Teiresias from the Underworld, concerning the death of Odysseus when, having planted his oar among men who know nothing of the sea, Death will come to him from that very medium (23, 264-284). "Very clear proof" is contained in this *sema,* too, we are told (273). Another proof arises in relation to the scar on the thigh of the returning hero which is recognised by his old nurse Eurykleia (23, 73). It may be considered that a deliberate attempt has been made to tune the mind of the reader or listener to certain features the author wishes to stress; and even more, that he desires that we think deeply about the leads he is offering. Gregory Nagy has perceptively demonstrated how the word *sema* occurs in contexts of the *Odyssey* where it works in parallel with the nouns *noos, noesis,* or the verb *noeo* and its derivatives. This brings into the equation the need to *recognise, think through or interpret* the import of the *sema*.[1] We might equally say in modern idiom, *decode* or *unpick* the secondary meaning of the sign.

With this encouragement, we will forge ahead in the expectation that some at least of those great signs and many others less heavily signalled will eventually yield a message of very great significance, for why else would the poet take such care to bring them to our attention? He has set up a treasure trail for our entertainment and enlightenment in which such weighty matters as the nature of the soul and its eventual destination are hidden discreetly within a sequence of remarkably memorable adventures.

'Soul', in the Homeric canon, has many aspects. It is too complex to detain us for long here. The 'soul journey', however, is within reach.

Psyche

Future pages will find supportive evidence for a wider cultural context of the circular soul journey, which is more often than not a hero-journey. But first some acknowledgment must be made of the work of Jungian-inspired mythographers such as Joseph Campbell and Karl Kerényi, for whom myth reflects the most fundamental preoccupations of the human psyche. The heavy emphasis on the feminine which characterises the *Odyssey* was interpreted by Jung as a pattern of integration in which four stages in the growth of the *anima* (inner self) are represented by Circe (the instinctual), Kalypso (the romantic), Nausikaa (the spiritual) and Penelope (the wise).[2] For Jung, the eventual reunion of man and wife, Odysseus and Penelope, represents the final integration of *anima* and life. By this analysis Odysseus would be travelling away from a primitive state of being towards a more fully developed, civilised condition. These are conclusions that might equally well be reached by the literary scholar and without resort to the technical language of psychology or religion, for we are all to some extent students of human nature. Nevertheless the great psychologist's analysis of our hero confirms something that may also be found by diligent comparative study of all ancient epics, namely that they deal with the great universals of life and life after death and the means to preserve the self, or the soul of the self. Nor would many dispute the Jungian evolutionary paradigm as an apt template for heroic advancement, for the Odysseus who returns to Penelope proves as strong and wise, even wiser, than the hero who departed for Troy. Although Homer's sensitive portrayal of feminine nature can scarcely be attributed to any Jungian training, it does raise an interesting question concerning the universality of archetypes such as hero, predatory male suitor, faithful wife, etc. which leads one to ask, can the truths perceived by the poet derive from the fundamental sameness of human experience? It seems highly likely. Here too would be an explanation for the striking similarities of thought shown in cultures divided by space, time and tradition, to which must be added the other experiences held in common, such as the topography of Earth and skies, season and change.

By extension, if same or similar cognitive processes underlie the development of man's 'thinking in symbols', we need look no further for an understanding of the many striking mythic parallels which cross the cultures. We are merely required to learn its language, its cultural envelope so to speak, and having learned, to apply our knowledge to fresh contexts. There may be no absolute correspondence, but in this area the spirit of the message can be as valid as the letter of the law. So we shall

begin at the beginning with some well-established fundamentals of ancient symbolic thought concerning the place of man in the cosmos. Since it involves a vast field of enquiry and this chapter must not linger too long with introductory remarks, I have focused on some aspects which are held in common by early cultures, in particular those that are founded on the doctrine of axial connection.

Soul and Cosmos

The title of this book anticipates an astral journey undertaken by a heroic adventurer. Yet it could be asked why *any* hero of the ancient world should be dispatched by the poet or singer to voyage among the stars, rather than across oceans, for as a test of endurance, the sea is a more than adequate adversary. The first 'formal' cause to come to mind is the journey related by holy men and women and known to us as shamans, medicine men, or witch doctors, who believe that by entering into a trance state they (or their spirit) can travel between the three worlds of Earth, Sky and Underworld to intercede with the deities. It was commonly believed that by the powerful intervention of the shamans the sick on Earth could be healed and wise counsels or other gifts brought down to man from the gods. This is a near-universal concept, still common among traditional societies and enduring at populist level even in the developed world.[3]

The shamanic 'means of transport' is some variation of the *axis mundi* such as a tent-pole or tree which will be 'climbed' then later descended (in imagination or trance, not necessarily in practice). The whole process consists of a three-part journey of *departure* - *interlude* - *return*, which students of Homer will recognise as the underlying structure of the *Odyssey*. In their mind's eye, shamans visualise the power to climb descending upon them from the very stars which are their goal. From the earthly perspective, it was simpler to refer to this 'bridge between worlds' as a staircase, a ladder, a tree, or even a flight of arrows where each missile is locked into the next in unbroken succession; nor was the human dimension forgotten when genealogical lineages were invoked to demonstrate descent from founding ancestors. The stars not only defined a place beyond this world, they indicated a place beyond Time itself, for only by denying the major physical parameters of life on Earth could the mystic escape from this world of sorrows to the other realm where all was imagined to be constant and unchanging.

Does the *Odyssey* reflect a shamanic journey? Such early and enduring religious practices had spread far from their Asian homeland by the eighth century BCE and are now well-attested as an early Greek phenomenon, at

least in respect of the systematic application of an ideology of *axis* and *omphalos*-centre in building, ritual practice and decorative arts.[4] Odysseus' relation of his adventures in the first person ("I did this, then that occurred…") in the court of King Alkinoös is performed in the recognisably shamanic style of narration. From departure to engagement, then to return and re-telling of the whole 'out-of-body' experience, the pattern is identical in each case. But it also has to be recognised that the graded, three-part episode or series of episodes is also the format used in initiation rituals, or 'rites of passage', where *physical* displacement (into unfamiliar territory or social exclusion) serves as a practical metaphor of *spiritual or social* transformation.[5] The traditional pattern requires that the initiand must first be isolated from his normal surroundings and his habitual state of mind. Then he endures a temporary, liminal state of transition when he is of neither group, before he is judged sufficiently altered to return to his community, to reintegration and enjoyment of enhanced status. This is the pattern of Telemachos' quest for self-fulfilment which takes him to the houses of Nestor at Pylos and Menelaos in Argos related in books 2, 3 and 4, while the instruction he receives there and his return to Ithaka provide the audience with a foretaste of the greater journey made by his father, and with the same end results: tests of character and physical strength triumphantly overcome and special knowledge acquired by men of exceptional qualities.

Such rites are a constant in virtually all societies. In an archaic Greek context it is the mystery religions such as those conducted at Eleusis that come to mind as potential influences on any esoteric subtext. (Eleusian ritual actually involved 'separation, instruction, return' via a journey on foot from Athens to Eleusis, and return to the city). Nor should one overlook the evolving philosophies of the Orphic and Pythagorean schools of thought which concerned themselves with the Afterlife of the soul in its final destination among the stars.

The work of Plato lies several centuries in the future, long after the first appearance of known Homeric texts. But one has to wonder why the philosopher chose to place Theseus and Odysseus in his *Myth of Er* as heroic witnesses and likely participants in the cycle of rebirth known from Pythagorean and Orphic philosophies. Did Plato sense or know some eschatological inner meaning to the earlier epic which he was equally obliged to preserve elliptically, relying on his listeners' sensitivity to such symbols? The choice of these two mythic heroes as 'fellow travellers' invites a comparison between Theseus' penetration of the Cretan labyrinth (and his killing of the Minotaur man-bull, his escape using the thread provided by Ariadne, his female helper, and eventual return to Argos) and

the voyage of Odysseus, in which the latter slays many monsters and in time regains his homeland with the guidance of Circe, Kalypso and Athene. At the heart of many such adventures lies an Ur-myth of self-discovery in foreign or fantastical territory which interprets, more often by implication than by direct exposition, the writer's world view or his religious conviction. This holds good whether the adventures concern the travels of Odysseus, the voyage of the Argo led by Jason, or Dante's soul-pilgrim led through a structured, multi-levelled landscape of Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso; or even certain Christian parables involving adventures of modern children in the land of Narnia (by C.S. Lewis) or lengthy battles between good and evil forces immortalised by John Bunyan's travelling pilgrim, or Tolkien's Hobbits.

Plato incorporated the travels of Odysseus into his own cosmological dialogues. One scholar[6] has argued that Socrates in the *Phaedo*[7] becomes a 'new Odysseus' whose experiences refigure the wanderings of the earlier hero; by this token, the epic narrative is to be seen in retrospect as an account of a *spiritual adventure*, not merely a set of physical experiences, with the Homeric text providing an idealised template for any other 'soul journey'. The staging posts on this mental pilgrimage are described by Zdravko Planinc as 'omphalic' in recognition of the shamanic foundation of the *Odyssey*, for he is convinced of the traditional sources of the oral material. If this is a valid interpretation, a valuable resource of wisdom teaching has so far been lost by an obscuration of the inner text by the surface text with its many beauties and excitements. Or perhaps the fault is ours, and as a result of our dependence on surface realism ('proof' and 'reality') we have lost the delicate points of reference upon which the system relies.

In his *Phaedo*, Plato allows Socrates on his last day on Earth to describe an upper world which far surpassed the beautiful things of the lower world where man makes his home. It is purer in all manner of ways; men of surpassing wisdom live there without disease, blessed by health and happiness amongst the gods who occupy their temples in the pure ether and regularly communicate with them, face to face. The Earth, in contrast, is formed of a labyrinth of underground passages and volcanic craters where water and wind ebb and flow in a ceaseless round. Right through the centre lies a great chasm (for us, an *axis*) leading to an abyss, which Homer and others have described as Tartarus. Plato grants Socrates the opinion that the noble and pious among the departed, as well as the less virtuous, are carried by boat to the lake of Acheron to be tried, punished or rewarded. Those who have conducted good lives eventually return to live again on the Earth's surface, whereas those exceptional

beings who have been purified by philosophy are freed from the body for all eternity; though Socrates cannot pause to describe where they might go except to say that it will be an even fairer habitation than Earth. Here is a layered definition of the cosmos which provides the parallel layers of a judgmental system allowing movement upwards and downwards, the upper level ("pure ether") being the most perfectly desirable.

Even more remarkably, "the true Earth" (which may be a vision of an 'ideal' Heaven or our own planet, the text is not clear) is said to resemble a ball made from a patchwork ball of *twelve* colours. For De Santillana and von Dechend, this feature echoes a simile in the *Timaeus* (55C) concerning to the twelve faces of the Demiurge,[8] with the implication that the world is a dodecahedron, in short, that it is composed of a global form which encloses the Zodiac of twelve 'houses'.[9] The dodecahedron provides the frame of the whole, Sun, Moon and planets included. This, they say, is the Pythagorean cosmos defined by number and time which found expression in the Orphic deity, Chronos, not the Homeric Kronos but the Chronos Aion, "Time Unbounded".

These glimpses of Orphic and Pythagorean thinking in Plato's cosmological speculation (when taken together with references to the cosmos of Homer and eventually, via the *Myth of Er*, with the soul journey of Odysseus) are a reminder that Homer's philosophy concerning 'last things' cannot be considered in isolation from contemporary and later movements. Stanford,[10] for one, has suggested in his commentary that Odysseus' vision of the seated Minos holding his golden sceptre and dealing out punishment to the dead (11, 568ff.) was a later interpolation from Orphic sources, but who can tell how ancient those sources were? The possibility of early Egyptian influence on Greek ideas extends the time frame beyond imagining, and our assessments are based on surviving texts which provide little or no true chronology for pre-literate thinking. Although this one incidence of soul-judgment (by Minos) which was not elaborated elsewhere in the text of the *Odyssey* may be atypical of the general view of Hades given us by Homer, that need not rule out its antiquity.

Plato finally brought Orphic ideas to fruition in the *Myth of Er* when he too had the souls carrying records of misdeeds on their way to underworld judgment by Minos and his brother Rhadamanthys, among others. Perhaps the great philosopher was responding to something he felt to be implicit in Homer's view of the fate of the soul. He had, after all, and as a successor to the great poet, experience of the fruition in his own time of ideas circulating between Egypt, the Middle East, India and the wider Mediterranean area. Here a necessarily brief excursion into these ideas

will assist in establishing a short chronology of the soul journey in surviving literature.

Cosmos and Afterlife

Early Iranian literature has a well-developed concept of an Afterlife journey which features the need for a crossing of the celestial bridge *Chinvat* (the 'separating', 'judging' or 'dividing' bridge) after death.[11] This is one of many celestial 'death roads' through the sky where dangers lurk for the unworthy soul destined to fall from the bridge between Heaven and Earth into existence as a hapless shade. Many such mythic traditions propose a soul journey to just such a celestial destination where conditions are the reverse of those suffered on Earth. The way there is far from easy, and must be prepared for in this life. For a fuller picture, however, of the possibilities of life after death we must look to the tradition in Egypt**,** where the New Kingdom Pharaoh, "wise from birth" and god-like, immune to error,[12] acts as an axial conduit to the favours of Heaven. Egyptian concepts of the soul's journey, although alluded to time and again, are so variable that they are difficult to formulate. In his recent comparative work on early civilisations, Gregory Shushan has commented on the lack of a linear or logical narrative in the complex, repetitive textual references to places, directions, dangers and delights of the Egyptian Otherworld which make it particularly hard for the modern scholar to formulate a clear view of Afterlife doctrines.[13] He notes the problem of whether it is the nature of the Afterlife to be cyclical, or whether linearity is foreign to the system as a whole. From the present writer's point of view, there is little difference between the Egyptian system and the Greek Afterlife as expressed in the *Odyssey*: both cyclicity and non-linear development will soon be shown operating in functions relevant to thematic development. To answer Shushan's question, Egyptian Afterlife may well be expressed in cyclical terms, but that need not be a simple reflection of a circular mode of expression used in that culture to strengthen an argument. I believe circularity and connectedness to have been at the very centre of the Egyptian belief in a unified cosmos. And a repetitive cycle of birth and rebirth is found in cultures where the reinforcing circularity is nowhere near as obvious as it is in Egypt.

There are many tangibly transparent elements in Greek and Egyptian visions of the Afterlife which may be grasped and noted as points of similarity, even if they cannot be readily systematised. To avoid overburdening the reader unnecessarily, Egyptian and Homeric views of the Afterlife are catalogued here in a brief résumé which recognises

multiple, shared aspects of the Afterlife journey. (Some will be explained more fully as the work progresses).

Egyptian and Homeric Soul Journeys

Motifs broadly held in common by both the Egyptian and Greek systems are, variously, the following: *geographical* and *maritime:* transport by boat involving islands, canals, rivers, marshes and celestial oceans. Geography embraces the *astronomical* when the transformative journey spans three planes, four cardinal points and the east-west extremes of the horizon as well as the starry heavens. The circumpolar stars and constellations of the zodiac (especially Orion and Sirius) have parts to play in a voyage which may rise past the Moon and Sun. A form of shorthand designates agents of transformation under familiar titles, among which are many *axial forms*: trees, ladders and the rays of the Sun, by which the soul climbs to an upper realm, while coffins, temples and halls function as divine *omphalos*-type reservoirs of power or coming-into-being. *Architectural* elements such as gates and their guardians also mark points of transition; and *paradise* is identified with gardens or fields and palaces. The journey has its *mystical / esoteric aspect* in which the soul or Self is identified with light, or with *rebirth* through water, a process which begins in the Netherworld. *Bathing* or other forms of ritual purging may take place; *Judgment* is identified with cosmic balance; *Stars,* beneficent gods or divinities guide the voyager's way; and '*knowledge*' will protect and prepare. *Dangers* include the risk that the soul may be dismembered or swallowed; demons, and powerful, even seductive *Female Guardians*, will aid or advance the soul's progress; *fire, snakes, arrows* and *blows* will threaten its survival; *darkness*, and *bodily inversion* in the Netherworld, are to be prepared for. *Paths to a goal* demand knowledge of the way to Rosetau (an Egyptian equivalent of Hades) where the soul may earn rebirth, or an ultimate goal, a "White *Palace* of the great ones at the Beaten Path of Stars",[14] probably a point on the Milky Way.[15] Complementary *paths* involve descent in the west through a 'Field of Reeds' and ascent to a 'Field of Offerings' associated with the northern circumpolar stars. These are very similar to cardinally-aligned paths which will guide Homer's celebrated hero to his final destination.

But at this stage we must not anticipate our dénouement.

The End of the Journey: Egyptian, Orphic, Greek Doctrines

Since the final destination of the soul can probably reveal more about spiritual aspiration than the means of travel, we shall focus briefly on reaching this location. There is a cycle of 'lives' to be gone through in the Egyptian system. The *Coffin Texts* refer to a "second death" which is to be avoided where possible. After the first death, which is the death of the body, the deceased loses his spiritual part, the *ba*, and this event leads into the second death. Some fortunate individuals escape the second death because the judgment passed upon them is favourable. It is suggested that they could then survive for ever in a celestial hereafter on the 'Islands of the Righteous' or in a heaven which, unsurprisingly, replicates the pastoral beauty of the Nile Valley. The many *Pyramid Texts* speak of a great island which has a Field of Offerings (a paradise) for the king (and later, the ordinary man) who gains its shore.

Once established there, the successful 'traveller' can expect to enjoy many pleasures, not the least of which is the Tree of Life which sustains them.[16] Again, this is none other than the prime symbol of a heavenly connection, the living tree or *axis mundi* which grants life and life-enhancing, edible gifts in the form of wine or fruits**.**

The Egyptian *Books of the Dead* share features in common with Orphic ideas of the Otherworld journey which are known to us primarily from gold tablets interred with the deceased in Southern Italy, Sicily, Thessaly and Crete between the fourth century BCE and the third CE, but possibly older and related to an oral tradition, judging by several errors in transposing hexameter poetry.[17] Their purpose appears to have been as an *aide-memoire* of key phrases intended to guide the dead through the Afterlife or to remind them (or the guardians of their destination whom they will meet on the journey) of the ritual purity they had obtained in this present life.

Although the mythic Orpheus belongs to legend, the Greek world formulated in his name a set of beliefs in the stellar origin of man and the stars as the soul's ultimate destination. Freedom is promised for those whose souls could achieve a higher state of evolution. None however could reach their goal without a structure which confirmed their suitability and readiness for the undertaking. Whether the goal was self-achieved or gained through a structured process such as initiatory mysteries, at some stage the soul must be confirmed as worthy of elevation. Some form of judgment must take place.

It is difficult to put together a coherent picture of the eschatological expectations of the Orphic initiate, but some features predominate. The ideal Afterworld is sought elsewhere, not in this world, though it is possible that the deceased will be reborn into new life on this planet, not once but perhaps many times. Immortality or escape from the circle of metempsychosis is the real ambition of many souls. That happy condition will be achieved in a place similar to the Isles of the Blessed and in a time recalling the Golden Age when men and gods dwelled together (in the Age of Zeus) as described by Hesiod.[18] But first, there are obstacles to be overcome, guardians to be appeased and ascetic self-denial to be practised in the name of a greater good. Orphic themes and concrete metaphors recorded on the grave tablets defined a rigorous route to salvation.

Parmenides, Plato and Pindar

Among other early Greek sources which treat the soul journey in a cosmic context, there is notably Parmenides' *Proem*[19] which describes a journey by 'sky chariot' towards the light, passing through a universe bearing some similarity to Hesiod's own *imago mundi.* Both to some extent reflect Orphic ideas.[20] These can be put into perspective by examining some exceptional lines in Pindar's second *Olympian Ode* to Theron of Acragas, victor in the chariot race in Olympia in 476 BCE. It is surprising to find such early views of the Afterlife, the judgment of the dead and metempsychosis which are atypical of fifth century Greek tradition as we know it. On the other hand, Acragas in Sicily was not only a centre of culture and patronage but one which inspired the fifth century philosopher Empedocles, who famously declared towards the end of his life that he knew himself released from the cycle of reincarnations, now a god and no longer mortal.[21] This is the spirit of Pythagorean Orphism as it appears to have flourished in the Sicilian Greek colony and was possibly held by Pindar's patron.

In this Ode, the poet sets out a vision of 'last things' in just a few lines (56-70) which provide one of our earliest surviving testaments to a formal scheme of Afterlife conditions. The deceased belong to one of three categories: the 'sinners', who are judged and sent to Hades; the 'good' who have earned a comfortable Afterlife reminiscent of sybaritic existence on Olympos, and lastly, the thrice-incarnated who have lived blamelessly and are finally allowed to enter the way of Zeus which leads to the Tower of Kronos. The reward of such heroes as Peleus, Cadmus and Achilles is entry to the glorious golden world of the highest Heaven. For the moment, we shall set aside the important axial connotations of 'way' and 'tower', and

the reference to Hektor as the 'pillar of Troy' found later in this Ode, for a point of special interest is the placement of the second, good body of men, the judged, who according to Pindar live without work in the light of the Sun, and whose days are equal to their nights (61-62).

Balance and Imbalance

An 'equinoctial' land as implied here by equal days and nights has provided much material for thought.[22] Whereas Pindar's damned are condemned to utter darkness, and the 'most just of all' enjoy a temperate climate, the intervening country appears to be a pseudo-Elysium located precisely in space and time at the spring or the autumn equinox, when the plane of the Sun's orbit corresponds to the Earth's equator. On just those two days, the two great orbital circles of the celestial equator and the celestial ecliptic are briefly balanced on a single plane. This median placement identified by Pindar confers remarkable soteriological emphasis on the condition of balance or equality; in Greek, *isonomia.* It can be deduced quite rationally that if the solar and equatorial planes are aligned, then the pole of the solar ecliptic (the conceptual pole of the Sun's orbital plane) will also briefly stand parallel with the pole of the Earth's axis on the days of the March or September equinoxes. Heaven and Earth will be as closely 'at one' as they are ever likely to be.

It is this regular co-incidence of ecliptic and Equator which defines the Golden Age; its dislocation, if it should ever occur, would result in a destructive event such as the shifting of the polar axis of the world and the onset of a new but lesser Age. Great Flood, Fire and Death are further outcomes of a solar year stretched beyond repair.[23] The astronomical cause of such an event, which many now believe to have been apparent to many early developed civilisations, would be the phenomenon known as the Precession of the Equinoxes, not to us the work of impious races or warring gods but a detectable cyclic wobble in the Earth's axis, the north-south stabiliser of the equatorial colure. The wobble arising from the slow gyration of the Earth's axis around the pole of the ecliptic is attributable to a gravitational pull from the Sun, Moon, and other planets on the Earth's equatorial bulge. There will be much more to say about this phenomenon and early history of its documentation (figure II-2).

The concept of 'equatorial balance' seems familiar to both Homer and Hesiod. The relative powers of Poseidon and Zeus are claimed by the former god (rightly or not) as equalities of station and destiny (*Iliad* 15, 210). Homer is precise, too, about the equal distribution of the various planes of existence, as he makes clear in the episode of the Golden Chain,

where Zeus threatens to cast any disobedient mortal into Tartaros, which is "as far beneath the house of Hades as from Earth the sky lies" (*Iliad* 8, 16). This observation is true to the spirit of Hesiod's "bronze anvil" which will take the same amount of time (nine nights and days) to fall from Heaven to Earth as from Earth to Tartaros.[24] Into this ideal accommodation of space and time, evenly distributed, Hesiod tells us, the seeds of disruption will be sown by warring gods or Titans whose conflicts end the first Age and the happy condition of "the golden race of gods and men" who have until this moment enjoyed health, wealth and a life of ease.[25] Here we have three equidistant planes all liable to disruption. But the central, Earth plane corresponds to a particular solar phenomenon which has been signalled more precisely by both Pindar and Parmenides.

Balance, equality and justice (and the Gates of Night and Day drawing upon Hesiod's *Theogony*, 125ff.) feature in Parmenides' *Proem* and the surviving fragments of the following poem, where the cosmic journey of the soul leads the poet from the darkness of Hades to a place of equal night and day:

> "All is full of light and of obscure night at once, both equal, since neither has any share of nothing."[26]

This further 'co-incidence' of day of night is much more than the abstract 'opposition' of the two recorded in such schemes as Aristotle's *coincidentia oppositorum*.[27] Its emphasis on light and equality points to an ideal condition distinct from the death place, Hades. Yet by including the "obscure night" as part of the Elysian balance, the philosopher has given us a place, an event and a quality which homogenise space, time *and* condition. The origin of such ideas may well lie in Pythagorean mysticism teaching the migration of souls through successive bodies. But there is more to say concerning equatorial balance and Parmenides' lines can be given a wider context which will later show some relevance to cosmic conditioning in the *Odyssey*.

Parmenides' mythic take on the equinox also involves the development of cosmic metaphors concerning gates and thresholds and passage between the two leaves or posts of the door. So we meet the poet as he passes from Night to Day through a great gate where the 'paths' of the two meet. 'Avenging Justice' controls the two alternate ("*amoibous*") bolts or keys which hold the door fast or permit it to open. Echoes of 'balance' and 'equality' (boosted by the underlying similarity between swinging door panels and tipping scale-pans) reverberating once again through these lines are confirmed by the presence of a female figure, Justice, as the agent of harmony. (Justice is a prime axial quality, since both moral and physical

stability depend upon balance or 'straightness' of like kinds). Later in the poem[28] where mythic discourse has ceded to a more rational (but still confusing) mode of expression, ever-alert Justice is in control of 'Being' and 'Non-Being' and holds fast to her 'fetters'. Night and Day fill the cosmos equally and Justice occupies the solid middle plane in a series of layered 'rings' which surround the Earth.[29]

There are many problems of definition here, not to mention authorial intent. Inevitably they must lead to a questioning of both Hesiod's threshold of the Gates of Night and Day[30] and Homer's picture of the Laistrygonian kingdom, where the courses of night and day lie close together and departing and homecoming herdsmen may earn double wages (10, 80-86).These are issues to be faced in later chapters, where Odysseus' affinity with cosmic gates and doorways will be considered in some detail.

The End of the Journey: Indic *Vedas*, Near Eastern Epic

Comparable cosmically-aligned philosophies were articulated in literature vastly older than the Greek epic or the early *Homeric Hymns*. There are the wonderfully poetic but (for a Westerner) extremely difficult hymns and songs of the *Vedas,* the divinely-gifted and sacred Hindu texts believed to have been handed down for millennia without change. From internal astronomical evidence, their composition has been dated as distantly as the third millennium before Christ, though more conservative estimates propose a date *circa* 1200 BCE, which is still adequate to provide a source of influence on our own poet.[31] With their structure and contents long held sacrosanct as inherited revelation, the four *Vedas* were to influence Indic thinking through many centuries, culminating in the Puranic age[32] when Indic tradition achieved its clearest expression of individual responsibility for spiritual development. There is a distinct possibility that such ideas either originated from or influenced theories concerning 'last things' in the Near East, Egypt, and the wider Mediterranean. Certainly some of the great Indian epics such as the *Mahabharata* bear strong thematic similarities to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey.*

The *Vedas* propose a heavenly destination for the good, in the skies, and a Hell for sinners. The nature of Hell is less clearly defined than Heaven, where Yama, the god of the dead, dwells above in eternal light[33] in the company of the 'Fathers', mortals who have transcended their origins to become one with the Sun. Ordinary men merge into elements of the cosmos as winds, plants or waters; and so life continues, but not in its original form. Eventually however a Hindu doctrine of rebirth came into existence as a reward for knowing a certain mystery and performing

correct rituals.[34] This is in no way a guarantee of a blessed Afterlife in perpetuity, for Hinduism viewed the cycle of repeated rebirth, *samsara*, as highly undesirable. It was freedom from the cycle which promised the greater happiness. The determinant was the proper conduct of the individual, in particular his adherence to and respect for the ancient law, *dharma*, the cosmic law determining the universe which was at the same time a moral prescription for the inhabitants of this world. If unsuccessful, the soul risked being reborn into animal form. Consumption by the 'Devouring Goddess' may sound a dreadful fate, but was presented positively, as one way of reaching immortality.

There is a great deal of 'swallowing', or escape from such, to be found in Homer's *Odyssey*.

Certain literary milestones in Babylonian literature also indicate an individual fate for the souls of men. Some, like *Inanna's Journey to Hell*,[35] are indeed cast in cosmic terms, in this instance the descent of a stellar goddess often associated with the planet Venus, who sinks in the west at evening and rises with the dawn in the east. Other Babylonian cosmogonic texts invite the listener to consider the structure of the heavens as a paradigm for social and moral organisation of society below. They testify to a manner of thinking which associates ancestors and myths of origin with the skies and the involvement of the gods (which are often linked to stellar bodies) in the affairs of men. Inevitably, return to the primordial condition in a distant primordial paradise would be the greatest ambition of *homo religiosus* of any culture, and so it proved in the Babylonian world.

The greatest of the extant Near Eastern Epics, *Gilgamesh*,[36] a text dating to at least 1,600 BCE but containing even more ancient material concerning Otherworld journeys, is often compared with the *Odyssey*. This too, we shall have cause to consider as another cosmically-focused epic. There, the hero's travels bring him to a mountain "whose tops [support] the fabric of Heaven, and whose base reaches down to the Underworld".[37] This is the mountain that in so many traditions, including the Greek, unites the three levels of the world and ensures an interactive relationship between man and god; it comes well into line with the mountain of Olympos said to be common to all three of the planes allocated between Zeus, Poseidon and Hades (*Iliad* 15, 193). A tree with its crown in the skies and roots in the Underworld would easily be recognised as a symbol of the World Axis, but here in Homer's *Iliad* we are introduced to the second most common allomorph of the *axis,* the World Mountain performing the same unifying, stabilising function. Homer does not grant his World Mountain a role in the soul journey, but it is otherwise in

Gilgamesh. On passing through the mountain at the behest of its guardians, then crossing a *cosmic* sea[38] that normally only the Sun can cross, Gilgamesh comes to the perfect jewelled garden of a Babylonian 'Noah', Utnapishtim, who escaped a great flood, where he was to find (and sadly, lose to a rapacious snake) the much-sought plant of immortality.

Later we shall reveal how Odysseus' own journey takes him along a multiform of the same *axis* to arrive at his final destination on Ithaka.

Before we can define the course of our own Greek hero's search for immortal life, it will be useful to clarify an archaic geography which did not necessarily confine itself to two dimensions, or for that matter, to terrestrial geography alone. We shall begin by examining some of the oldest cosmograms known to man. These are not maps in the modern sense which record the plane of the Earth, rather do they seek to define the lower, visible world in terms of a cosmic totality. We can expect to find the Earth defined primarily in relationship to the skies, where stars or planets determine the fates of man, and where the whole is imbued with a sense that the 'map' serves as a tool of instruction showing man's place in the wider order and the path by which he may achieve integration with his goal.

CHAPTER TWO

ORIENTATION, MAPPING, COSMOGRAMS

Modern consciousness has been deeply conditioned by skills taught to us in order that we may read the written word and interpret pictorial media. So familiar and universal are the disciplines of reading and writing that it is easy to overlook the implications of a life organised without them, and the extent to which that conditioning in two-dimensional representation (the printed word and the moving image in books, films, television, for example) has blinkered our awareness of the three dimensions in which we move and play out our lives.

Foremost among potential areas of confusion are the cardinal directions of east, west, south and north, and the terms employed to denote these four quarters of the Earth. In Western convention, north is nowadays placed at the top of the map or globe, hence at the 'upper page' level of our active reading. The compass, which is now used to verify this important alignment, functions by virtue of the magnetic quality of the polar north, thus coincidentally reinforcing the north as 'top'. The primacy of north is further strengthened by the historical fact of the evolution of great early civilisations in the northern hemisphere, but the curious fact is that even in among similar ancient societies in the southern hemisphere north is the prime position and always equivalent to 'up'. To the Incas of the Andes, this fact is self-evident since they are aware that rivers always flow downhill, in common with the 'rivers' of the Milky Way (which to the naked eye are seen to flow from the north to the south, or upper to lower heavens). It follows that these galactic streams must also take their source from the north.[1] This is mythic reasoning at its most pragmatic. Since it is based on close observation of the natural world it must be taken seriously in any discussion of pre-literate belief systems.

Homer can have had little or no reading experience, nor did he know the compass, which was not devised until approximately the tenth century of our era. His directions are identified by the winds and their point of origin or alternatively by the stars which guide the traveller at night. There is an important distinction to be made here: winds must occupy not one but two dimensions, the horizontal and the vertical; and stars, being above, are simultaneously 'over there', 'up there' and 'down there' according to

their elevation. Therefore it would be an anachronism to consider that before the invention of the two-dimensional map or three-dimensional globe the indication 'north', however delineated, would necessarily and exclusively refer to the land or sea lying away from a given point to another given point, in the direction of the Arctic territories: that is, on the Earth's surface. Whether the surface lies on a flat-Earth plane or a spherical globe makes no difference to the argument. Both winds and stars occupy a space which lies roughly between the Earth's surface and the visible limits of the arching dome of the sky. And since archaic cosmology considers every earth-form to be a repetition of the celestial, in a system where each reflects and determines the other, all that lies between the earthly and heavenly planes belongs to both upper and lower worlds.

The Latin designation of the north as 'Septentrio' is a possible reference to the seven stars of the Great Bear, which again links the upper terrestrial hemisphere to the highest fixed stars in the outer celestial hemisphere which were so vital to navigation. The remarkably useful feature of the circumpolar stars which circle the North Pole Star (Polaris in our century, alpha Draconis in the age of Homer) is that they never disappear below the horizon, unlike so many others. They are relatively constant, and none is more constant than the polar star itself, that 'Nail of the North' (figure P-1) which pins our world to the dark outer sea. If one were looking for a world without change, the very antithesis of life on Earth where all is change and decay, the Pole Star or any other measurable constant would be a prime candidate.

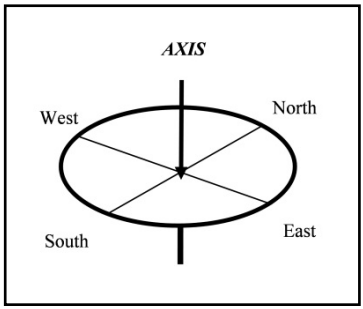

Figure II-1

The reader will be wondering whether Homer always means ‘up’ when he says ‘north’, or indeed whether any of his named wind-directions can be trusted to mean what they say. Any answer we might conjecture will depend upon the context and whether the poet is speaking in some vastly extended metaphor which places the whole or some of the epic narrative in a cosmic setting. This is not beyond imagining, but at this point any search for precision would involve too much of a distraction from our purpose.

The present investigation assumes a dual system wherein all directions are capable of being extended beyond the terrestrial horizon, so that the equator extends the plane of the Earth to give a celestial equator, and the north polar point on our Arctic wasteland may indicate the distant North Pole Star along an extension of the Earth’s central axis. Direction and its contextual import will be analysed as we progress further along Odysseus’ allocated path.

Direction and Dimension

The researches of Durkheim and Mauss (1963) and Lloyd (1966) have revealed the extent to which polarities and oppositions provided an organising factor in early thought; that of Homer and Hesiod is no exception. In Greece as in Egypt one of the fundamental polarities to the organisation of human life is associated with the horizon points of east and west, the rising and the setting of the Sun. The all-powerful Sun (determinant of life on Earth) provides metaphors of life and death, light and darkness, past and future, and much more. Consequently the values associated with east and west carry more weight than their companions north and south. We will not forget however that Hades is an Underworld in all early Greek literature[2] and that the Sun appears to move from west to Underworld and thence to east in its nightly course; these matters are particularly important to any reading of the homelands of Aiolos, and especially Kalypso; from western *zopho*s to eastern *eos* the sequence takes in an intermediary space south, or ‘down’. In our concern with the surface exactitude of the text, it is easy to forget that in a system predicated on the Sun, each cardinal point is in the process of becoming another. Homer’s cardinal points are not the exact equivalent of those with which we currently organise our space; on the contrary, they describe relationships with the Sun. This must be why Skylla’s mist-shrouded cave (12, 80f.) where certain luckless sailors are swallowed down into her belly is turned *pros zophon*, towards the misty west, as well as “toward Erebos and the dark…” One follows consecutively upon the other.

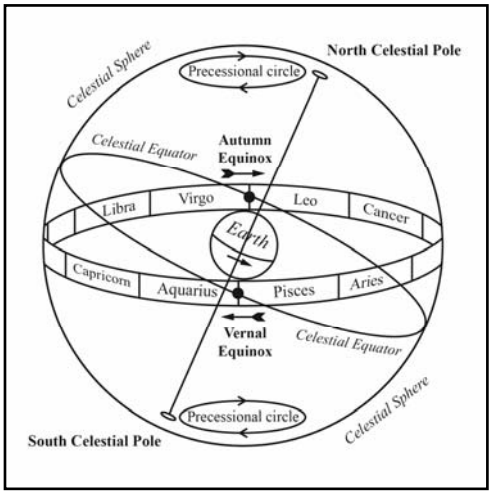

Figure II-2

Once we have begun to envisage a three-dimensional world it becomes clear that not four but six directions are required to describe the three dimensions of infinite space when these are indicated by lines and their end-points (figure II-1). First one must imagine the plane of the horizontal equator divided by two arms (east-west and north-south) extending into space. When a vertical axis uniting the poles is projected through the meeting point of the two arms (where they intersect from E, W, N and S), three combined radiating arms (two horizontal, one vertical) will point away from the centre and into the six directions of space. The vertical is that *axis mundi* linking zenith to nadir which ties Heaven to Earth; it is commonly the pole of the Earth but can equally be the pole of the ecliptic (which also carries the other four directions of which we speak). So, to this simple plan of three-dimensional space one must introduce the ecliptic circle whose apparent tilt defines the seasonal solar patterns (figure II-2). The plane defined by the Sun's orbit lies at an angle of 23.4 degrees to the celestial equator (i.e. the Earth's equator projected out into space). The extreme heights of the zenith and nadir marking the highest and lowest points of the Sun at noon and midnight are significant not only in measuring the passage of time and season (and related calendrical events) but also, esoterically, in defining stages in the soul's evolution, in metaphysical discourse which takes its imagery from nature. Zenith and nadir as the termini of the Sun's passage (as seen on Earth) readily acquire the character of 'high and low points' of human consciousness. This is a

concept readily transferable to other visible phenomena, such as the Milky Way in its overlap with the ecliptic path. A further element illustrated in figure II-2 is the gravitational tilt of the world's axis which takes its termini away from the Pole Stars of north and south, with the subsequent effect that it redefines the centre of the night sky for successive generations of men. This is the phenomenon of Precession, that is, the 'falling back' of the equinoxes, for the cycle of change alters the position, in respect of background stars, of the highest and lowest points of the Sun's annual orbit and the point of equinoctial balance. This knowledge, too, is encoded in the *Odyssey*.

Time and Space

Another crucial adjustment to be made is to factor in the Sun as indicator of both direction and time. It has always been the 'clock and compass' of the people and largely remains so in rural societies to this day, for not only does the Sun's position define the four quarters of the globe, it also reveals the hours and the seasons. To this end, the Sun will have been closely observed and measured, both at its highest and lowest points, its rising and setting at dawn and dusk, and at its highest and lowest points at noon, when the hour can be 'read' towards the south by observers in the northern hemisphere. This leaves an indeterminate area in the north, or rather at the highest point above the noonday zenith, which can only be defined (in the absence of the Sun on its journey 'below the Earth') with reference to the circumpolar stars. Obligingly, these never disappear below the Earth's horizon and are a sure enough measure of direction for the night-traveller. But it is the Sun which watches over most human daily activity in three cardinal directions, east, west and south. In consequence the upper north is not an area penetrated by man except in apotheosis: it belongs at night to the stars and the planets and most importantly, to the Moon and the gods. It is quite another country, and all the more mysterious and beguiling for that.

The greatest precision as far as time is concerned rests upon the points of sunrise and sunset, east and west, the great polarity which provides many a metaphor for the course of man's life and his leaving of it. By the process of analogy, the rising of the new Sun is man's moment of birth; he enters into maturity in the fullness of the solar presence and fades in accordance with its sinking into darkness in the west. This much can be drawn from the concrete nature of Homer's measurement of time and space which employs mutually inclusive terms relating to time and place: days at sea, an arrow-distance between islands, a day of ploughing, an

hour for the unyoking of oxen, the shadow of a ship's mast. A moment's thought will establish that activity in the poet's world (and the bulk of his similes) rests largely upon the experiences of the ritual year, warfare, cultivation or navigation, and that in all three the position of the Sun, its movement (time) and its intensity determine the course of human activity. The phases of the Sun deserve and are also given personifications of a noble order as if he or she were an aristocrat of the skies. White-robed, golden belted Dawn, *eos*, is both east, the morning, and ascent; first trailing her rose-tinted fingers, she is soon 'dancing in the heavens' on her *choroi* (12, 4) when the Sun has gained the high places in the sky. Helios the Sun god quite fittingly rages against the theft of his cattle, and at the moment when he is revealed in the fullness of his being (not dawn, not dusk) he threatens such severe retribution against the offending sailors who have eaten his cattle that the gods rush to do his bidding (12, 374-388). By contrast, in the west the Sun is swallowed into darkness with only a brief moment of visible descent, but the brutality of this mysterious disappearance of light imposes a cessation of most human activity, having clear affinities first with sleep, and then with death, which is permanence of sleep (*Iliad* 23, 51; *Odyssey* 20, 356). As in life, so in poetic discourse: the fabled journey of Odysseus is not only coloured and given sense and meaning by the circuit of the Sun, it is also measured out in time and space by those same points of solar reference.

The solar points which define the course of the hero journey are identified as the first eight 'islands' visited by Odysseus as he sails around a great circle which must be either the ecliptic or the celestial equator.

Directions

The simple diagram presented as figure II-3 marks four cardinal directions which are further divided by the solstice points of the Sun's highest and lowest seasonal rising and setting. The latter roughly approximate to the intercardinal directions NE, NW, SE, and SW, giving eight directions in all. The cardinal directions conventionally applied to the Earth's equatorial plane have been in this instance projected outwards on to the plane of the ecliptic in order to relate them to solstice and equinox. The zenith-nadir line passing through the centre of the equatorial line cannot be shown in this two dimensional figure, but is to be assumed as an outward projection from the meeting point of directional lines. It is the same line as the vertical axis described in our first example of direction (figure II-1).

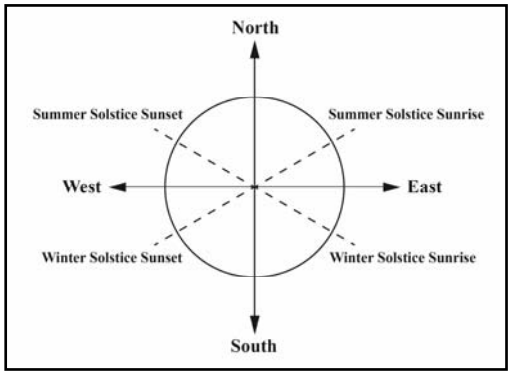

Figure II-3

Figure II-3 includes information relating to both the daily and the yearly cycle. In the course of a day, the Sun apparently circles the globe once, and a series of such circles (approximately 365) completes the year. But the area covered by its successive circuits extends no higher, nor any lower, than the lines of the Tropics, which can be recreated in the figure by joining the solstice quarters with horizontal lines, from right to left, from NE to NW, for example. The addition of vertical lines joining the two tropics would result in a square box enclosing the circle and its significant points. This solar frame has been advanced by De Santillana and von Dechend (1977) as a 'Frame of Time' central to early man's concept of his solar-defined world. It must be central too in our attempts to unravel Homer's more-than-physical geography.

At Home in the Zodiac

This leaves an area 'beyond the Sun' which may be interpreted as an area of darkness. We mean to show that it is in this sunless region that the solar voyager must find another road to guide him to his objective. The Sun cannot be observed at night but at dawn the stars are just visible, and it is those stars in their constellations which give background to the newly-risen Sun. Plotting one against the other, ancient skywatchers will have noted the heliacal rising of a celestial object in sections of the heavens long since categorised as the Circle of the Zodiac. It has become apparent to modern researchers[3] that what was more important to ancient astronomers, even than the Sun's location itself, was the heliacal rising of certain stars, those rising immediately before the Sun. Celestial co-ordinates (such as these involving both Sun and stars) which made use of

all the fixed or predictable elements in the visible system would have acted as check and balance. In the course of these pages we shall see how such meeting points help to define the various island homelands of the leading characters in the epic.

Two great circular patterns related one to the other have now been identified: one, the circle of the directions (extended 'compass' directions of the Earth) projected around the centre of the great polar axis, and two, the ring of apparent solar transit which carries the Earth and its companion stars and planets through wider space (ecliptic). These must be visualised where they lie within a third circle, that immense ring of constellations widely used to give a longer term measurement of the Sun's position, the Zodiac. This and the galaxy itself will feature in our researches, especially the visible galactic arm spanning the sky diagonally from one house of the Zodiac to another, which forms our Milky Way. Therein lies another story, and another great circle.

Galaxy and Way

This mighty Way circles the Earth from a north- to north-easterly direction towards the south or south-west, falls from sight and reappears in the north-north-west, to circle our globe once again across the opposite diagonal towards a southerly 'exit'. (In the Homeric age it stood nearer to the vertical than it does at present. Such changes are the result of the precessional shifting of the world's polar axis). It is, as far as the untutored observer is concerned, a pair of separate starry rivers rather than the single band science has now revealed to us. Although never seen together, the imagination does not fail to propose a crossing of the two 'rivers' where (by analogy with the crossings of equatorial or solstitial paths) a place of conjunction arises. Perhaps because such a centre implies a bringing together of cosmic forces of the four directions, the crossing point acquires a religious importance easily transferred to myths of origin, power, or rebirth. (Here is an early source of the magic and mythology of our earthly, mundane crossroads where two pathways meet). And since the galactic path of the Way moves diagonally across the solar path there are other highly potent conjunctions, none more so than the meeting of the Way with the solstice points. The coming together of Way and solstice occurs in the house of Gemini in the north and the house of Sagittarius in the south. All this is highly relevant to our unfolding interpretation of the *Odyssey*. First though, if we are to understand the special language of sky-dimensions as it is used by the poet, we must set aside impossibly modern

concepts based on globe, compass and telescope and consider what units of measurement were in fact available to early observers.

Understanding the Winds

By understanding spatial direction as it is viewed and traditionally interpreted, rather than as currently known by scientific measurement, we shall be in a stronger position to evaluate Homer's directional terms. The first hurdle to the interpretation of direction is that instead of the terminology of cardinal points, the poet uses the names of winds that are understood to blow broadly from those directions. Boreas (north), Notos (south), Eurus (east) and Zephyros (west) are the four named winds, and this is largely how directions are defined in the *Odyssey*. However Homer's winds are not unfailingly confined to the Earth, nor to direction, and they exhibit a wider frame of reference. In the most 'cosmological' episode in the *Iliad* (5, 720-752) Hera, wife of Zeus the weather god, is described as emerging from the gates of Olympos aboard her sumptuous gold and silver chariot drawn by four horses who are "wind-swift". They draw her "through the space between the Earth and the starry heaven" (769) and this is how she is shown on a metope from the Parthenon. Hesiod's gusting Tartarus[4] also comes to mind as another cosmic placement of the natural element which detaches the winds from specific direction and sets them in savage, contrary gusts inside the gates of Hell. In this instance, the gusting ("this way and that") is symptomatic of chaos, which, personified as Chaos, is the father of that 'Night' which runs around the bronze wall of Tartarus itself.[5] Winds, whether in the upper skies or in the darkness below, may exercise a wider metaphoric function than the merely directional, for by their constancy, or lack of it, the winds may typify order or disorder, and no more so than when they are whipping up the surface of the sea which is the supreme model of death-threatening dis-order. Since much of the *Odyssey* is devoted to moral or social dualities of various kinds, and as polarities can express conflict as easily as complementarity, the behaviour of the winds deserves close scrutiny.

The winds of Homer may be more than they seem at first sight and no more so than when they are creating stormy hurricanes in the air, which are reflected in the vortices of the sea. Even the absence of wind becomes a potent metaphor for the 'still place' unattached to this Earth.

Solstice and Equinox Points as Directions

When we come to localise the major adventures of Odysseus, some caution will be required in the placing of equinoctial east and west, since there is no certainty that they were strictly 'cardinal' in archaic times. Solstice days can be determined by simple fore- and back-sight technology or by watching a mountainous horizon for the most northern and southern appearances of the rising Sun. The Sun appears to 'linger' as he makes his slow solstice turn. In comparison, the spring and summer equinoxes are more conceptual than actual, to be deduced from a halfway point between the solstices, the latter being the more tangible 'standing still' places where the Sun halts, stands, then turns within three days. It is perhaps by very reason of its fleeting nature as a cessation of time that the equinoctial point becomes by extension a place of exceptional harmony, acquiring the character of a remote but desirable land where everything is in harmonious proportion. The Biblical Eden is traditionally placed in the east, wherever that may be; we know however that life is without toil in the Paradise Garden until the disobedience or 'forgetfulness' of Eve leads to the expulsion of the first man and woman through the gate (probably a cosmic gate) guarded by the Cherubim. Wherever the first pair now makes their way, life will never be the same again after the loss of a Tree of Life lying, as it seems, on the equinoctial plane which identifies perfect balance.

Aristotle's classification of the winds seems to have been based on a connection with solstitial points and not as one might have expected on a division of the circle into four, eight or twelve units, as in the style of the modern compass.[6] The position of the Homer's geographical homeland actually favours a division of the circle into units of four, eight or twelve, [7] for the midsummer Sun rises approximately 30 degrees north of east (and the midwinter Sun 30 degrees south of east) in the region between Athens and Northern Egypt, and exactly at 30 degrees on the island of Rhodes. This measure allows an easy conversion of the circle into twelve equal parts [12 (or 4+4+4) x 30 = 360].

Nevertheless, in the absence of a hologram, an eight-point 'rose of the winds' which gives a simplified version of winds and directions (in which the intercardinal and solstitial points are harmonised, the north-east, for example, becoming simultaneously a wind direction, an (approximate) solstice point and a 'compass' direction as we know them) is probably the easiest way for the modern reader to grasp Homer's intention.[8] The explanation of Odysseus' travels which is to be presented here relies upon the eight-point system as the one which allows the most logical accommodation of the major adventures to terrestrial or celestial

directions. Ever-present, though barely stated, are two centres in the sky: the North Pole and its star at the head of the polar axis, and the centre of the northern hemisphere which is defined by the extended pole of the ecliptic. In every case, the half-way point coincides with the centre of the Earth-plane; and while the northern high-spots are granted southern companions and these are of some interest to the philosopher, they are of necessity less visible and less easy to locate.

If then, we speak of eight points around a circle, these are not necessarily the circle of the compass, even though the conventional terms of north, north-east etc. are employed for simplicity's sake. Unless reference is made to terrestrial north, etc., it should be assumed that we are dealing here with eight points on the ecliptic circle of the Sun's daily revolution, and at times the yearly circle. Occasionally both daily and yearly rotations will be invoked, as they are in the highly compressed diagram given as a frontispiece to this book. It also has to be borne in mind that the combined daily and annual rotations describe a spiralling helix which rises in the spring and summer phase before it descends into autumn and winter, then resumes its climb and starts the sequence again. Such considerations are fundamental to the doctrine of the metaphysical *axis* and the separate paths which carry the soul up or down, between successive states of being.

Next, the importance of the octet needs to be explained. It contains the substance of the mystical number seven added to the 'one' which represents the sum of the seven, and is widely applied as the symbol of cosmic balance, justice and infinity.

The Symbolism of the Eight

There is some support for this eightfold option in the ancient and mystical symbolism of that number. In systems which consider the circle to be perfect image of the sky dome, and the square the appropriate symbol of the Earth (by reason of absolute differentiation, as well as with reference to the four supporting axial pillars sustaining the heavens, thought to stand on the four solstice points) the eight-sided figure is the first which will adequately 'square the circle' and bring the two forms into communication. From this figure derive the octagonal Christian fonts and spires of our churches, for example, and octagonal motifs in Arabic art and architecture, among others. 'Squaring the Circle' is also a leading principle in the ancient symbolism of Masonry. It is an eight-petalled lotus which serves as the foundation marker to the traditional Indian house, where it also overlies the central point where the head of the chthonic

serpent has been pinned down with a pointed stake.[9] The eight in this and other instances serves as a marker to the *omphalos*-point of the mystic Centre. That it has become so reveals how crucial the physical centre and its esoteric companion, the 'Centre', has become in defining order and balance and continuance of life.

The Centre

Power and centrality have always gone hand in hand, and no more so than when the home, temple or city is defined in terms of a connection to Heaven.[10] A rabbinical text[11] speaks of Jerusalem as concurrently the navel of the Earth, foundation of the heavens and centre of the world, a role which it preserved even in the following Christian centuries when a 'celestial Jerusalem' marked the world centre on mediaeval maps such as the famous *Mappa Mundi* of Hereford. Associated with this desirable centrality are superabundant holiness, purity, wisdom and freedom from sin, which flood outwards from that mystic Centre defining the meeting of vertical and horizontal space, to bless and 'fertilise' the entire land of Israel, in the case of the holy city of Jerusalem, or Mecca in the Islamic lands. The city or its most sacred central monument is a very model of the life-giving *omphalos* which marks the conceptual point where an *axis* meets the plane of Earth.

The sacred intersection also marks Time (capitalisation here marks this as a reference to a major abstraction, rather than a specific moment of time). At the centre of the Temple of Jerusalem, over the waters of the Tehom (the 'abyss') a foundation stone is said to have been placed to mark the exact centre of city, land and cosmos. One of the names of the shard so used draws upon a verb meaning 'to fix the warp', in which may be seen a reference to the symbolism of the loom and the square frame of the world (of which, more in later pages).[12] 'Place meets Time' in those legends or beliefs that identify this as the very spot where Yahweh first created the world, as well as man, woman and life itself.

Rituals conducted at this centre of Time and cosmos will have re-created and re-inforced the bond with Heaven, but no ritual was more necessary than that conducted in Jerusalem on the Day of Atonement. Failure or contamination of the rites of this day were reputed to bring about the disruption of the whole cosmic order, due to the fall of the central pole ('*axis*') of a world hitherto maintained to the delight and blessing of all who lived close to its foundation point. Constant reiteration of that vital connection was necessary to the preservation of social order, as we have so often said. The outcome of any 'over-toppling' would be

chaos, exile, suffering and death through the agency of fire, flood and earthquake. Only by 'recreating the Centre' could the old beneficent order be recovered, and this ritual re-creation of original time would provide the substance of many rituals of return and reintegration. Such anxiety was no mere superstition, for the world does regularly tilt on its axis due to the phenomenon known to us as the Precession of the Equinoxes, as mentioned in earlier pages. Although in fact a relatively harmless and gradual event, Precession has the effect of throwing astronomical records out of kilter, thus for any society which based its calendar, its rituals and its agricultural cycle of production on the regularity of celestial events, such a divergence would inevitably evoke great fear of imminent world destruction. Having set up an axial mythology of central connection, our ancestors were inevitably to live in dread of losing all that the connection meant to them. In our century it has become abundantly clear that such myths of centrality and the decentralised loss of balance derive from an observable phenomenon for which our predecessors had no explanation, though they could observe or imagine its effects. In the mythic language of pre-literate or traditional societies the 'axle of the mill' is torn out, the Tree of Life uprooted, or the World Pillar is struck down, displaced or overturned, and those waters which the foundation stone formerly held back then rise up to engulf the world and initiate a new Age.[13] Our poet was no stranger to omphalic centres and *axes* of the world nor to stones mysteriously associated with the Underworld, and we shall shortly see that a fear of cosmic disturbance lies at the heart of his hero's journey and the urgent need to return.

Next, we shall demonstrate how multiples of four provide the framework to ancient and traditional attempts to reduce the plan of the heavens and man's place in them to the memorable working schemes we call cosmograms.

Figure II-4

Cosmograms

The first cosmogram (figure II-4) is a shamanic drawing executed by the Chukchee people of Eastern Siberia. It defines the four directions and their essential crossing point, here once more a replication of the 'nail at the centre of the sky'. The Milky Way too, makes an appearance, crossing diagonally as roughly parallel, star-filled lines from a spot close to the 'nail' (Pole Star). Lower left is seen the country of the dawn, and upper right holds the world of dusk, and night is configured below, centre. Sun (left) and Moon (right) appear in the intersections against a starry background. The figure makes a remarkable reference to a centre point in the sky which is to be identified not only by the separate markers of space, but by a moment in time when those markers converge, for the section of the Milky Way visible to us is not a static phenomenon, any more than is the Sun or Moon, yet here they are all coming together to identify the significant central point.

Such a four-fold "quaternity of space" is not exclusively shamanic. It is perpetuated in the imagery of major religions, where it expresses not only the fundamental unity of the universe but also the route to be followed 'out' of this world and into the higher Heaven, where divinities are thought to dwell and where eternal life awaits. Thus although ancient cosmograms describe visible phenomena their intention is esoteric. The Chukchee shaman who drew the cosmogram shown here has identified his destination, which will be the focus of his ecstatic ritual and his simulated climb up a World Tree. His desired goal is the point where features coincide and the greatest power resides. It is a traveller's map, but only in the sense that the shaman will be travelling in spirit.

Implicit in such a four-square division of the heavens is the notion that the world of darkness and the world of light alternate in the course of the day. The fulcrum of their motion is the Pole Star, seen above in this shaman's cosmogram (at the intersection of the arms) as a minute circle. There is another factor visibly at work: the stars shining in the darkness turn about the centre point and those closest to the Pole Star ('circumpolar') never sink below the horizon, as far as the northern observer can tell. These facts are evident to both modern and ancient observers. The cosmogram reproduced here records both solar and polar features in something resembling a map of the sky in which day and night features are combined.

Our most ancient and widespread surviving cosmogram, the swastika, is another figure in which solar and polar events are recorded, this time in a simple line drawing. It is not alone in its function as a subtle but complex résumé of man's condition.

Figure II-5 a, b, c

Ancient Ideograms

The swastika (a Sanskrit word) was universally recorded (figure II-5a) long before its introduction as the emblem of German National Socialism. From India to Ireland and from Central America to Mongolia, it is recognised as a prime cosmic symbol generally representative of benign forces, though the age and original meaning are uncertain. Among the strongest possibilities are variations on the division of the heavens into four quarters, as seen in the previous cosmogram, and defined by the central point. Guénon[14] argues that the cross formed by the arms occupies the horizontal or equatorial plane and its rotation around the motionless centre expresses the 'Principle's' action upon the world, that is, the cycle of creation. The gamma-shaped arms which also point to rotary movement around the centre interpret equally the rotation of the stellar bodies around the Pole Star, or it may be the solar circuit. In this way the swastika acts both as a particular symbol of the northern skies or northern territories of the Earth and as a reference to the divine influence of the heavens, its very simplicity and condensation being a factor in its memorability. It is an early motif in ceramic decoration of Greece and Minoan Crete, and credited, moreover, as the origin of the Greek 'key' design. Esoterically, the swastika can imply secular or celestial power but it is sufficiently adaptable to embrace the idea of spiritual power and the central (but all-knowing, all-informing) existence of the deity or First Principle from which life emerges. Therefore its essential meanings are 'rebirth' and 'prosperity'.

The caduceus (II-5b) associated with Hermes, messenger of the gods, is another ancient symbol which differs from the swastika in portraying

not the central point but the vertical axis linking celestial and terrestrial centres to one another. Yet it complements the swastika and points the way to other compound figures such as the mountain, the tree or the pillar, all of which can act as representatives of the Centre at the same time as they reach up to join Earth to the sky, and down, to link Earth to Underworld. An important element in the caduceus and its many variations (or 'allomorphs') is the reference to dual motion: 'down from above', or 'up from below', which are conveyed here in this figure by the two twisting ('spiralling') snakes in apposition. It is fundamentally a question of divine influence from above and mortal aspiration from below, but the duality lends itself to a range of figurative references to inversion, or 'upside-down-ness' which in turn lead to some strange and puzzling imagery, such as the inverted axis forms of the 'inverted tree' or 'inverted mountain' which will be encountered later in these pages.

The Chinese Yin-Yang symbol (II-5c) is, like the swastika, a graphic reference to Creation itself, the cosmogonic process of 'coming into being' out of an invisible 'nothing'. In Western thought, 'something' cannot come from 'nothing', but in Taoist thinking, everything derives from the void or formless ocean of darkness which is Non-Being, for this is endued with all potential; from this very Non-Being, which is represented in the Yin-Yang by a black circle or sphere, the reality we call Being (represented by a white circle) emerges and blends into a single form, 'Yin-Yang', which indicates both 'Oneness' (the Tao), and the Way to the One. The essential unity of creator and creation is expressed by the inclusion of smaller, counterpoint black and white circles, and the whole reflects an interdependent duality of nature arising from the balancing of the two life forces, the Yin (white, feminine, passive) and Yang (black, masculine, active). The same merger of feminine and masculine principles is represented in the *Odyssey* by the physical and spiritual reunion of Odysseus and Penelope which completes the epic.

Is the Yin-Yang a cosmogram? Since it describes the emergence of life from a void which can only be the void of space, it must describe the act of Creation (cosmogony) as well as an evolved condition. Over time, the Yin-Yang has matured to become a symbol of 'right conduct' in human affairs, based upon cosmic harmony. Finally, in its capacity as 'the Way' the Yin-Yang proposes a route or means of progression from one condition to another. As we have remarked of the caduceus, the metaphysical sense is never far away, and may indeed be prime in all early graphics relating to the cosmos.

In this important respect, the Yin-Yang corresponds to the mandala, a Buddhist and Hindu meditational tool known from flat, two-dimensional

paintings or three-dimensional models. Inside concentric rings, a square, cardinally-aligned structure having four gates (sometimes known as a palace or temple, for it is sumptuously golden and be-jewelled) houses the deities. Inside some mandala circles appear eight 'cremation grounds' associated with eight angry gods, and these in turn relate to eight cardinal and intermediate directions, and sometimes zenith and nadir too, so this is another cosmic image embracing the Earth and its position in space. The 'anger' of otherwise beneficent deities reflects those negative aspects of human nature to be overcome through hard-won enlightenment. Each of these eight points has meaning or value in respect of human consciousness, as well as man's ties to the terrestrial world and issues of life and rebirth. At the centre (in the '*bindu',* which in art is always white or silver, like a pearl) reposes the chosen deity with whom the meditator seeks identity; his journey involves the negotiation of circles and horizontal and vertical axes by which the centre is defined. This is the most complex application to spiritual life of the cosmic model that we have reviewed, and the closest approximation to Odysseus' physical and spiritual journey encountered so far.

Geometry, Metaphysics and Biology

Geometrically-based symbols such as these few discussed above are relevant not only to the condition of the universe but also to the physical condition of man whose being imitates the universal model. He has a vertical spine (unlike other four-footed mammals) so his head, and his intelligence, are held above the spine just as the *axis* sustaining the world is ruled by a principial, creative intelligence, emanating from the heavens. The metaphysical implications of this state of affairs proposes a total being founded upon a system combining the horizontal spiral (e.g. a rotating 'swastika'), with the vertical *axis*, in which the latter is imagined as a vertical, cylindrical helix. That is to say that the rising movement of the swastika's rotation on a horizontal plane around the centre common to both figures bonds together the vertical and horizontal, and each complete spiral of the horizontal, up or down the conceptual *axis*, registers an unspecified state of the being, at any one time. The *axis* provides the active principle, the principle of Being ('essence') influencing the passive horizontal figure ('substance') in its spiralling turns through the vertical helix. Each turn of the horizontal plane is immediate truth and its circle represents the human individual cycle.[15] These are highly abstruse matters but they are relevant here, for the journey to be described in following pages is conducted in terms both of progress around the circle and ascent /

descent of the (vertical) line. The circle, and especially its movement in a spiralling helix which was earlier discussed, has affinities with the day-journey of the Sun through twenty-four hours and the larger cycle of the year, through twelve months, and even the Great Year when a complete circle of the Zodiac is accomplished. The heliacal rising of the Sun in each 'house' having persisted for over two thousand years, by the time the Sun has transited through eleven more houses and returns to its original point of departure, almost twenty-six thousand years will have passed. As the hero of the epic sails between islands he is evolving in courage and consciousness and moving nearer to an ideal condition of Self-lessness, and this is the evolutionary and initiatory progress which is most fully interpreted by 'ascent', that is, elevation up and along the vertical.

The Earliest Cartography

We have no way of knowing whether in Homer's world such philosophies were illustrated by simple teaching diagrams sketched, traced in the dust or even modelled in three dimensions. The likelihood is however strengthened by the recovery of such an ancient artefact as the 'Babylonian World Map'[16] dated conservatively to the seventh century BCE (figure II-6). A small piece of clay on which a line drawing is supplemented by cuneiform text provides a precious insight into a perceived relationship of terrestrial geography to an outer celestial sphere, at the same time as it makes a statement about the centrality of a chosen locus. By linking a central location on Earth to a central location in the skies, it proclaims the privileged nature of the great city of Babylon, which lay, as the artist saw it, in the *omphalos* position on a great *axis mundi*. This, the earliest surviving 'world map' (but 'world' only in the sense that wider space is implied, without any attempt to record accurate topography) shows the city of Babylon at the centre of some triangular 'islands'. Until the fortunate re-discovery of another island fragment, it was thought that seven was the original number. However textual references on the reverse to "eight regions" and "Four Quadrants" leave little doubt that an even number was intended. If the image is reconstructed with eight roughly symmetrical parts, the rectangular city stands north of the centre (marked by a compass point penetration of the wet clay) at the midpoint of a wider universe, linking the world above to the terrestrial plane below. The presence of eight islands ("*nagu*") rather than seven, would define the centre by means of the directions which radiate from that point.[17]

Figure II-6

The exceptional value of this map derives from the combination of diagram and cuneiform text. Due to unfortunate damage, only five of the islands are defined and some descriptions are obscure or fragmented, but a few yield some sense of the unknown artist's intention. These are island five, which lies in darkness, "the Sun not visible", "where one sees nothing" (west or south, or 'Underworld?) and island six, "where a horned bull dwells" and a seventh, "where morning dawns", most likely the east. For us, direction is principally an abstraction, but here the cardinal points are coloured with mythic and probably ritual associations in keeping with the concrete imagery of the Zodiac described in the text, and remarkably similar to the idealisation of direction evident in the islands of the *Odyssey*.

There are, however, other intriguing pointers to a Babylonian cosmic world view. The opening lines of the (damaged) text speak of "a vast sea", a "bridge" and a series of gods, birds, men, beasts and serpents created on that sea by the god Marduk.[18] These sound very much like an early version of the creatures of the Zodiac, giving a sound reason to identify this sea as the dark distant firmament, conceivably Homer's "wine-dark sea". There are also references to travelling, climbing, and entrances. The islands may even serve as pointers to the Heavenly Ocean which, according to the cuneiform text, lies beyond the Earthly Ocean; in fact they may serve as bridges to the further sea where, again according to the text, stand eighteen named constellations of animals, who are former gods banished when the

old order perished with the overthrow of the chaos-monster Tiamat. The details need not delay us here; the crucial point is the recognition of two oceans in a star-spangled firmament which not only places Babylon at the centre of a vast but ordered cosmos, but also recognises a 'Heavenly Ocean' which flows somewhere between Earth and Heaven. Nor will the concept of a 'bridge to heaven' fall into obscurity, for the epic journey of Odysseus will shortly offer the hero more than one route to heaven across the intervening wastes of the night.

When the scribe signed his name to his work, he spoke of copying from an old exemplar, from which it may be imagined that such ideas contained in the artefact could have been in formation a century before, or even earlier. The old map confirms a notion which can and will be supported from other directions in this interpretation, namely that there are (conceptual) physical bridges to the other, higher world, and that a route exists whereby an individual may find his way to a centre in the sky.

There is a last task to perform before embarking on our version of the hero-journey: that is, to show how the early cosmic maps with their emphasis on centre and *axis*, direction and dimension, relate to mythic elaborations preserved in oral and literary traditions. It can be assumed that in multiple re-tellings, details will have been lost, forgotten or distorted, so any reconstruction must necessarily draw upon the most constant and likely scenario. And if by happy chance the speculative reshaping is seen to be consistent and persuasive, there may be a case for extending the model to other fields. With this in mind, we shall see how the legends of the mythic land of the Hyperboreans can be accommodated to the ancient world view of an accessible paradise in the extreme north of the polar skies.

CHAPTER THREE

HYPERBOREA AND THE MYSTIQUE OF THE NORTH

So far, the cosmos has largely been discussed from the standpoint of a sacred geometry, a formalisation of the traditional world view that seeks particular correspondences between the upper and terrestrial planes, whilst also projecting a balancing lower plane where the conditions of the upper layer find a reversed polarity in a dark Underworld. Such 'layered' schemes also presume a contrast of 'better' and 'worse' upper and lower worlds enclosing our earthly plane like some spiritual sandwich. As a general rule, the good powers resided on high and the less favourable below, though an occasional exception had to be made for a few Greek heroes and other notable individuals who ruled the underworld as judges of men. What is truly universal and as old as time, is the sense that at the greatest extreme from the mundane world there lies a dream world, an Eden or Nirvana, Happy Hunting Ground, an Isle of the Blessed or Elysian Field, an Ultima Thule where the most exemplary humans would receive final honours and immortal pleasures. The Egyptians reputedly aligned many of their Great Pyramids to the North Pole in just such an expectation that the soul of the deceased would make his way to that blessed location, but for later Greeks, the Egyptian-inspired legend of Atlantis recorded by Plato apparently proposed a blessed land lying far to the west, essentially a solar-inspired legend which hinted that the soul must follow the Sun into its vanishing point at the horizon, then pass below and beyond in its company. Some legendary paradises emerge as belonging to myths of polar, not solar, ancestral origin, in which the north is the holiest direction, yet others must be defined in terms of the Sun and its solar transit from east to west (solar myth). As with so much ancient mythology, the evolution and *raison d'être* of the two opposing strands have long fallen out of mind. It may be that the matter is culturally or geographically determined, the most northerly races having a Pole Star which can stand directly above the viewer, for instance, but at lower latitudes the Sun rises higher in the sky and the Pole Star is lower on the horizon, so inevitably the Sun in its beneficial (and sometimes threatening) duality dominates the

world view of more southerly races. The historian must be content with observing the predominantly polar or solar nature of any imagery, but this need not hinder a search for the beginnings of a myth which depicts a remarkable paradise long fabled among the Greeks. This paradise is especially generous to the earthbound territories.

Hyperborea

The Hyperborean legend offers a useful lesson in spatial reference, at the same time as it illustrates latent difficulties in reading and interpreting directions on Earth and in the skies. 'Direction' is especially problematic when the terminology is archaic and cryptic. Inevitably perhaps, and over time, celestial geography and the myths which gave it life will have been reduced to a mainly terrestrial geography once specialised knowledge of an esoteric nature had been diluted and diffused or the import of the legend forgotten. If however we experiment by turning the myth on its head and replacing terrestrial terms with those relevant to a wider geography, where justified, and include information drawn from myths of the *axis mundi*, we may find that the tale begins to make greater sense. Indeed, the (later) testimony of Plato's Socrates in one of the dialogues, *Phaedrus* (247C) to a 'hyperouranian region' *("hyperouranion topon"*) lying beyond the roof of the cosmos, a realm of "really existing being", may be sufficient to direct our imaginations not 'forwards', but 'upwards' in search of a supramundane paradise.

North or 'Up'?

The Hyperborean myth was known in Greece from the beginnings of European literary history, in the Homeric *Hymn to Dionysos* for example, and could well be vastly older in oral tradition.[1] Yet the mysterious Hyperboreans seem to have been a mystery to the Greeks themselves, judging by the number of locations attributed by them to the legendary race. Homer has no mention of them,[2] but the story has been retraced from numerous fragments.[3] The commonest attribution is to a distant, inaccessible homeland 'beyond' or 'behind' the North Wind,[4] with '*hyper*' interpreted in this fashion, combined with movement towards Rhipean or Taurus mountains to the north of Greece and with 'Boreas' presumed to be 'a mountain (or a wind) called 'Boreas or 'Bora''. This perspective may be termed 'horizontal' in that it follows the curve of the Earth towards the Arctic North, though not unequivocally towards the most distant polar point. A 'vertical' perspective on the other hand, is possible, if three

dimensions of space are brought into play. One late testimony from historian Diodorus Siculus (but quoting Hekataios, the fourth century BCE philosopher) alleges that Hyperborea is an island no smaller than Sicily, far to the north, which enjoys two harvests every year.[5] This, if correctly reported, gives an early indication that for some, Hyperborea was a paradise location separated from a mainland and possibly outside this world in the celestial ocean; moreover, the marker of exceptional fertility ("two harvests", unlikely in the far north) encourages identification of Hyperborea with other fertile 'islands' such as the gardens of Alkinoös, the Garden of Eden and the Hesperides. It could well be the northern paradise of polar myth.

Polar origins are confirmed if a perfectly acceptable alternative translation is adopted for *hyper*: namely, 'above'.[6] This would translate Hyperborean as 'above (a mountain or wind) called Boreas', thus pinpointing a land situated directly over a symbolic mountain of the kind we shall frequently describe as an axial marker. A strongly associative precedent places the Pole Star directly above a mountain, and remarkably, this mythic mountain still rises at the Pole in the pictorial work of the first great cartographer, Gerardus Mercator, who lived and worked in the sixteenth century CE. The far more ancient Mount Meru of Indic tradition [7] lies below the Pole Star, a fact which legitimates Meru as the home of the Hindu deities in Indian mythology and belief. No discussion of Meru can overlook the mountain, in fact any mountain,[8] as a potential form of the axis (or *axis*). In the language of the *Vedas*, the *Skamba* (pillar, prop, support) holds the Earth and Heavens apart at the Centre at the same time as it sustains the skies; the breath of *Skhamba* is the wind and he, *Skhamba*, as the power of the pillar or *axis*, 'made' the four cardinal directions from his wisdom.[9] It is the prime symbol of cosmic force which contains divinity, time and space as one. Configured as a person, or a primeval man, Skambha's body parts provide the raw material of creation. Whether or not these ideas were pan-Indo-European, the majority can be traced in the mythology and figurative imagery of the western world.

Hyperborean Symmetries

Both Olympos and Meru may belong to a substantial body of pan-Indo-40

European traditions held in common by the present East and West, and from the evidence of its major features, the fragmented legend of the Hyperboreans may be part of the same nexus. For example, the northern river Eridanos ('Early Burnt'), related to the northern river god of that

Hesiod, "deep swirling" from its source with the gods Tethys and Okeanos)[10] corresponds precisely to the Indian belief in a downpouring of the river Ganges from the Milky Way to the Pole Star, to the Moon, then finally to Meru, where it divides into four streams, and thence to the Himalayan range where it showers Heaven's blessings on the people,[11] much as Hyperborean agents send gifts overland to the Apolline temples of Greece. The life-giving river of Egypt, the Nile, was also traditionally linked to down-flowing waters from the Milky Way.

Herodotus, writing perhaps with intentional irony, famously declared that the Hyperborean country would need to be matched by a "Hypernotian" land in the south.[12] His observation was completely in accord with mythic thinking. The Buddhist northern axial mountain Sumeru is matched by Kumeru to the south or underside of the globe, and Akkadian *garsag-babarra* corresponds to an antithetical *garsag-gigga*. The Indic Mount Meru is sometimes shown inverted and meeting, at a central point, a similar upright mountain rising from the southern pole, 'egg-timer' or 'hour-glass' fashion.[13] Whatever the intention in these iconographies, the Earth when defined by its polar points or its axial pivot cannot be other than symmetrical, for any alternative would create instability and would in any case deny the universal law of coincidental opposites. Herodotus was right.

People in the ancient world (and modern world too) needed to find (or, *in extremis*, to create) symmetry and balance as a bulwark against disaster. When Homer gave the Ethiopians two homelands at the edges of the world, one at the setting, one at the rising of the Sun (1, 22ff.; 4, 84) he validated the principle for later thinkers such as Herodotus, for whom the Nile is matched by the Danube in the north, and eastern deserts find a partner in the west; a sacred tree to the right is balanced by a sacred tree to the left, and Scythians (they have dark skin, curly hair, and practise circumcision) are descended from the Egyptians (to whom the same applies) because they represent respectively the extreme north and south of the known world.

Another consideration arises from Menelaos' account of his wanderings in eastern lands, including Cyprus, Phoenicia, Libya and the lands of Aithiopians, Eremboi and Sidonians (4, 82-89). There (or perhaps only in Libya, for the text is ambiguous on this point) time is either speeded up or the seasons are condensed, with rams' horns growing rapidly and rates of reproduction trebled. No lord or shepherd can possibly go hungry, it is said. As the King of Sparta tells of his past adventures, at home in his "echoing mansions" decked with gold and amber, silver and ivory, so like the halls of Olympos, as Telemachos remarks to Nestor (71-

75) the listener's imagination may well begin to identify Olympos with Sparta and Sparta with the blessed lands of the Aithiopians and others bracketed with that latter country in its divided two-part existence. They are each and all blessed with riches. Is there something else they have in common, something that they might share with Hyperborea?

Prosperity and Well-Being

Important features of the Hyperborean country are its perfection, purity, richness and remoteness. In these respects it bears many affinities not only with the Homeric Olympos as we know it from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* [14] but also with the tradition to be gathered from Hesiod and later writers concerning the Isles of the Blessed, or Elysium, and other such 'peripheral' places at the edge of the world. Life is easy there, even luxurious. It is notable that wherever a land of marvels is placed in terms of compass direction, if it lies at the far limits of the known world (as it almost always does) it is generally credited with all that man most desires: wealth, ease, leisure, dance and song, supplies of abundant or magical food, health and happiness, all to be enjoyed by unusually populous and long-lived communities.[15]

The Mount Olympos of the gods which might well fall into the same supernatural category is immortal and timeless, standing far from the human world and enjoying clear skies and temperate weather (6, 42-45). Hephaistos built a gated town there (*Iliad* 5, 749-752) where each of the immortals had their own palace (*Iliad* 11, 75ff.); and from the *Odyssey* (6, 42-46) comes information that "the abode of the gods stands firm and unmoving / *forever*, they say" (42f., emphasis added). So this is no 'floating island' like Aiolia, nor for that matter, Delos, also recorded as unstable territory until the arrival of Leto to give birth to her twins Artemis and Apollo. As before, Hyperborea too is immune to extreme weather, and very bright, in which respect it resembles the Elysian plain at "the limits of the Earth" (4, 564) in having no snow, no rain, nor much winter (566f.) Now, unseasonable and consistent weather implies a negation of seasonal change and the happy avoidance of seasonal famine, which is an unthinkable but highly desirable oddity. Only a matching negation of time ("unmoving, forever" as Homer says) can explain such an aberration of nature, but then we are dealing with an Otherworld where every familiar earthly pattern is reversed, particularly the less happy conditions of life below. Homer's "forever" also acts as a reminder that Time cannot be removed from the discussion of direction, since the fourth dimension is an inescapable adjunct to the three-dimensional world, and especially so

when the latter is defined by solar phases, with the Sun giving man the daily measure of both Space and Time.

Hyperborea must lie in in that outer, magical territory ruled by the gods.

An Equinoctial Paradise?

A perpetual spring would arise in the Arctic territory of our globe if the Earth were to stand upright on its polar axis, with its Equator on the same plane as the ecliptic. Food would be available all year round and vegetation would never fall into a seasonal decline, so the conditions would be right for a Golden Age of Plenty.[16] What the science can show us, and the epic can confirm in its description of Olympian or Elysian paradises, including the garden of Alkinoös, is that an axis aligned to the true is a condition conducive to universal fertility, longevity, and well-being, with its reverse, or its unsettling, leading to disasters on a cosmic scale. Through awareness of the timeless felicities of a Hyperborean homeland in permanent balance, we can understand the tragic deterioration from a Golden World Age of "a golden race of mortal men", to the Ages of Silver, Bronze, Heroes and Iron, which the poet Hesiod used to characterise the gradual but inexorable loss of the ideal condition: only "bitter sorrows will be left".[17] Hesiod gives no cause of the 'fall'; it seems enough to record the effects; but the tale has too much in common with the mythology of World Ages recorded in several other cultures for us to deny the underlying precessional aspect of the myth.

There is no certainty that the Sparta of Menelaos lay on some true geographical equator (and certainly not if it is truly the Sparta of modern Greece), nor that other more southerly lands neighbouring the mysterious country of the Aithiopians were distant enough to lie on the mid-point of the Earth's circumference; but the east-west division of the latter does give certain pause for thought. It is a possible hint that in some sense favoured territories shared the benefits of the power of the *axis* to increase and enhance life, via the increase of natural fertility of land and livestock. We may therefore be dealing with a mythic geography which is simultaneously, and *in potentia*, a cosmic geography, a terrestrial geography and an axial geography ruled by proximity to the great vertical connection. The beauty of axial power is that it may be replicated by fire, sacrifice, or sacred instruments, and accessed through time-honoured ritual, at any time or at any place. Homer's list of favoured lands may point to territories of exceptional wealth, conceived as 'heaven-sent' but in actuality strived for by the performance of hallowed rites.

It appears difficult or impossible for mortal men to reach either Elysium or Hyperborea, not only on account of their distant locations or the dislocation of time but because of their distinctive attribute as homes of the immortals. This may be the underlying sense of the comment by Pindar (in *Pythian* 10, 27ff.) that the wondrous road to Hyperborea will never be found on foot or by ship, that is, we understand, by human means; this detail indicates an extraterrestrial location, as well as confirmation that any mortal traveller arriving there by non-mortal agency must be an exceptional individual. It is to be supposed that a mortal would need to acquire god-like status first (and in empirical terms, this can only be achieved via initiation) before admission to such a land as this. In recompense, or by an act of recipricocity which acknowledges the interdependency of Heaven and Earth, legend according to Herodotus[18] allows of a benevolent displacement of gifts and blessings from a (literally) superior location to a lesser equivalent on Earth, along a solar path defined by the descent of Apollo. Here the polar myth takes on distinctly solar characteristics which may indicate later accretions to the legend. The Sun god Apollo institutes a series of staging posts running north to south (or from the Sun's zenith to Earth?) via Dodona to Delos, through which marvellous gifts are conveyed.

These gifts may appear to have a corporeal existence, wrapped as they are in bundles of straw according to some versions and passed from hand to hand along the route, but not every one of them can be so defined. There are abstractions among them for they have an aura of 'fairy gifts' of the finest kind.

Hyperborea High Above

There are other astronomical references which may also betray lost fragments of polar or solar myth. Pseudo-Apollodorus[19] for one, tells that the 'Apples of the Hesperides' were to be found in the land of the Hyperboreans, whither Herakles was dispatched and where he discovered Atlas holding up the skies. Atlas is more familiarly known as the god of the axial pillar,[20] and if he is here on the magical islands, holding up the heavens, he is in all probability standing beneath the Pole Star which nails the *axis* to the sky. Hippocrates of Cos placed Scythia below Arktos, the Great Bear and polar marker, in conditions of ice and fog.[21] This is a 'polar alignment' of Arctic and Arktos, not necessarily an attempt to fuse the two into a single identity but close to our definition of a 'celestial' Hyperborea. Other writers elaborating upon the theme either skirt the issue

of identity or hint at it obliquely. They were after all dealing with an ancient myth, and geographical accuracy is rarely part of such legends.

Pliny the Elder[22] goes so far as to place the Scythians (northern neighbours of the Greeks) in the far north-north-east, where the summer Sun reaches its highest point at summer solstice and the Hyperboreans, he says, dwell even further beyond, which must conceivably place them beyond the solar ecliptic. Earlier in the *Natural History*[23] he reported the mythic homeland as a place where "are believed to be the hinges on which the firmament turns and the extreme revolutions of the stars", which is readily understood as the centre of the circumpolar bodies. Nor can the imagery of a cosmic door turning on its 'hinges' be easily disregarded. In the ancient cosmology of Finland (another peripheral land but one linked to the Mediterranean in archaic times by the 'Amber route' of early traders) the 'hinge' is one several synonyms of the Nail Star, the 'turning-point star'. This is a most vulnerable point in the heavens which is 'unhinged' by the phenomenon of the Precession of the Equinoxes (that precessional tilt caused by gravitational pull on our planet) which we shall frequently have cause to mention in these pages.[24]

Statius[25] the Roman truly hits the mark when he briefly gives the Hyperboreans a homeland not merely at the Arctic extreme but tied into a stellar relationship which hints at a co-identity of Hyperborea and Ursa Major (the Bear, or Charles' Wain, our Big Dipper): "The frosty wagoner of the Hyperborean Bear droops languidly, with backward slanting pole." Again, when Diodorus Siculus[26] suggests that the Moon can be seen clearly from the Hyperborean island and that it seems close to the Earth, we may understand just how far away the mythic lands of one man's imagination may be thought to lie.

'Paradise on Earth'

Setting aside cosmic speculation for the moment, it is a commonplace that the land of the Hyperboreans is generally known as a utopian land associated with tall, far off mountains on the edge of the world, or rumoured to lie in the region of the Taurus or Rhipean mountain ranges.[27] In all probability the mythic (Arctic) mountain of the north has 'slipped' to become those distant mountains more familiar to the Greeks. Whatever the case, mountain-girt Hyperborea has an earthly (or southern) counterpart in the island of Delos and in Delphi too, where Hyperboreans reputedly founded the oracle which became a rival to Delos.[28] Communication between Hyperborea and Delos is maintained by the Sun god Apollo, who brings gifts to the Greek island where his cult is celebrated.[29] On his

midsummer arrival in his chariot drawn by swans his lyre gives forth green shoots and birds sing out their praise (by which we understand 'renewal of nature'). Here is a classic axial situation where a straight line (horizontal or vertical) binds a heavenly abode in the greater cosmos to an earthly but privileged microcosmos on Earth below. The *omphalos*-point of emanation may well stand in the zenith or other point of solar power, communicating directly with Delos as the favoured omphalic point of reception.[30]

The consequence of the established bond is that Delos, or Delphi, will exhibit the major traits of its 'parent country'. As might be expected, we find among Delian traditions that the island serves as a portal to the gods [31] and that it receives treasured gifts from the immortals who favour it, even to the extent of 'abolishing death' or evidence of Delian mortality. A recorded exhumation of bodies in 426 BCE may well be related to a certain embarrassment in the face of an oracle's prediction that no births or deaths would occur on Delos, an elaboration having the hallmark of a borrowing from the mystical parent land which is 'beyond Time'.[32] The Hyperborean link seems at this stage to be acting as a legitimating factor in the aggrandisement of Delos, a political aetiology not unfamiliar in the ancient world.

The greatest honour of all is the choice of Delos as the birthplace of twins Artemis and Apollo.[33] Their pregnant mother Leto came to an island that 'floated', but once she had set foot on the land, it became 'fixed' when four great pillars rose up to secure the territory. These have too much in common with Atlas' sustaining pillars to be any other than the four supports of the firmament; for, once a territory is defined by the four supports of Heaven which also define the quaternity of the divided circle, the land enclosed is in conceptual terms an *omphalos*, and likely to be confirmed as such by a placement of an *omphalos* stone (as seen at Delphi). The island therefore took on the character of Homer's fixed, unmoving Olympos, or perhaps the fixed, unmoving Pole Star. It also acquired the mystical stability which only Heaven can grant. With the addition to the legend of the Sun god Apollo, who is the anthropomorphic embodiment of that solar power which energises the Earth with its life-giving rays, a primary *axis* symbol confirms the cosmic dimension of the story. It is perfectly apt that as a personification of the Sun, Apollo exemplifies justice, law, and 'right functioning',[34] for these are major attributes of the *axis.*

The 'gifts that flow from the north' are none other than the fertile bounty of an equinoctial region transferred southwards to a favoured counterpart.

Olives from Hyperborea

Fitting too is the donation of shade-giving olive trees to Olympia reported by Pindar as the achievement of Herakles, who is rumoured to have fetched the first olives from Hyperborea.[35] The olive is the Greek 'Tree of Life', a sacred tree which exercises the same cosmic function as *Soma,* the banyan or *pipal* (sacred fig) tree of India, or the Iranian *haoma,* or the vine of Dionysos, all of which are held to link Heaven and Earth in a mystic bond. The overt narrative intention to provide athletes with olive leaves for wreaths and welcome shade during their training is elevated to another degree of meaning by the attribution of a divine source of origin for the first olive trees at Olympia, that is, the happy complicity of god and man in a worthy endeavour at a sanctified location. This seemingly minor detail of tree and leaf will be more fully understood when we have studied the design of the Olympic homeland, looked again at Pindar's account of its early history, and placed it in the context of the *Odyssey*'s first Nekyia.

The 'Best' Direction

Such reflections on Hyperborea suggest a northern place so idealised that we would today call it a 'paradise'. The direction in which any paradise is considered to lie is very much determined by a culture's vision of the sacred direction, and this in turn is confirmed by religious practice. Those like the Egyptians who looked southward[36] towards Upper Egypt, the source of the Nile, considered the left to be their 'lucky' direction.[37] Another group, which includes Hindus of Vedic tradition, Jews, Mandaeans and Hittites as well as Greeks, favoured a northern and eastern orientation, with the lucky side to the right, as exemplified by the Hyperborean tradition. The Hebrew places his holy Mt. Zion similarly;[38] his God appears, resplendent, either from the north or over the north, or from 'his' mountain.[39] The Mandaean highest divinity, the 'Light King', appears in the sky as the Pole Star, while the holy book of the Mandeans (the *Sidra Rabba* or *Genza*) places the gate to the world of light, the 'Door of Abathur' in the north over the 'Mountain of Turquoises'. Prayer is directed northwards to the holy place which is also the 'Land of the Blest' for this sect, which is of Babylonian origin. Unsurprisingly, bodies are aligned at death by the Babylonian group so that they continue to face the north, as they did in life; this is a valuable indication that the north, especially the stellar north, has been an ancient destiny of souls in the Afterlife for many ancient societies. The Pyramids of ancient Egypt which (for many) are geometric versions of the sacred mountain are credited by

some Egyptologists with air shafts which serve no apparent purpose other than to open the burial chamber to certain stellar bodies, among which is the Pole Star, despite the one-time attraction to the south as the sacred direction. These orientations confirm the polar centre or some similarly 'regenerative' star or cosmic zenith as a destination of choice for the soul of the deceased in several cultures known to have influenced custom and religion in the Greek territories.

Orientation and the Quality of the North

As for Greek orientation in the Homeric age, we have Hektor's refutation of bird omens in *Iliad* 12 where he seems to dismiss the left as the 'lucky' direction, for it belongs to the west or the place of "glooming mist and the darkness" (240). The omen-watchers are evidently facing north. The same orientation is evidenced in the *Odyssey*.[40] On the other hand, there is little surviving evidence that Greek temples or houses were ritually aligned on the scale of the later Roman *templum*. We have to go back to the palaces of Crete in the Minoan Age to find evidence of early Greek spatio-spiritual architecture favouring a particular direction. Many great palaces on that island were aligned north-south, with variations allowing for some other solar phenomena undoubtedly relating to specific festivals and deities. Recent work by Lucy Goodison and other archeoastronomers is revealing the enormous importance of solar orientation in early Greek civilisation, initially in the laying of ground plans, but subsequently (in the case of Cretan palaces) via the use of multi-panelled door screens (*'polythyra'*) to highlight a seated or standing figure by manipulating available sunlight.[41] Evidence for solar-related ritual practice at Knossos and other palace-temples in the second millennium extends also to concise orientation of palaces towards summits where hill top sanctuaries were built, as if one could nourish the other.[42] The mountain, it seems, is the prime marker of the road to the gods, and since it points upwards, the destination must be celestial. It certainly appears so for the victorious athletes of Olympia who, according to Pindar, followed "Zeus' road to the end, to the tower of Cronus, where ocean breezes blow around the island of the blessed…" [43] Mount Kronion lies to the north of the great stadium of Olympia, where material evidence confirms the hillside as a traditional place of celebration.

General motion within the cosmos proceeds, according to Philo, from east to west, and in this view he echoes the Pythagorean worldview. Such a movement allocates north the prime position on the right hand side. Aristotle viewed the east the start point of cosmic motion, in consideration

of the rising of the stars in the eastern quarter, so this for him was the 'right' side in terms of both placement and 'luck'. Therefore the observer is again focused on the north. This theory is fully supported by the tale of the Hyperboreans, who wherever their land truly lay, were assigned to the north of the Greek-speaking world. When the eyes and mind focus on the blessings of the north, the right hand side which most humans favour inevitably becomes the lucky side.

Among the gifts bestowed by the north *per se*, or represented by the north wind, must be counted the gift of life for the Homeric hero, if the episode in book 5 of the *Iliad* is to be taken as representative of the poet's beliefs. There it is told how Sarpedon the son of Zeus, having been felled by the spear of Tlepolemus (who had threatened to send him "through the gates of Hades", 646) lay close to death under "a lovely spreading oak of Zeus" (693), until "the blast of the north wind / blowing brought back to life the spirit gasped out in agony". The divine oak (as an *axis*) undoubtedly had some part in his revival, but a well-intentioned north wind arriving from the direction of Olympos cannot be discounted. The same wind, "hastened" by Athene, was instrumental in battening down the roaring seas as Odysseus approached the shores of Scheria (5, 382-385), but since the north wind is never a kindly wind in our hemisphere, the blessing of life apparently conveyed by the north wind of epic has to be explained quite differently.

India provides the fullest and most complex directional scheme. Not eight, but ten directions including the zenith and nadir of the Sun were needed to embrace the visible world in all its dimensions. As before, east and the right were the lucky side,[44] and north and east were the places allocated to the gods and the life that flowed from them. The south was associated with the dead and the ancestors. Not only in prominent ritual but in every aspect of domestic life, especially the lighting of fires, conduct of marriages, and ceremonies marking the developmental phases of childhood, the important directions were faithfully observed from the earliest times. The resulting ideology determined that human action was to be cosmically aligned to the most beneficent directions.[45] Libations were poured on the ground to the east, for example, as this was the 'material' side of the elaborate ritual of *Soma*-pressing, but it was towards the north that spiritual activities were directed, and most effectively, it seems, during the northern course of the Sun. During a wedding ceremony the bridegroom would take his bride outside to observe the stars, leaving the most powerful until last, the Pole Star which has to be evoked for the blessings of children and wealth. It is the "firm one" and "the pillar of the stars", the "immovable Brahman". The hoped-for blessings include material

goods, but also "safety, long life, glory, renown, splendour, strength, holy lustre…" from which we understand that this is indeed a place of prime spiritual power.[46] In the *Upanishads*, Aditya is named as the Sun and lord of the eastern quarter, but he is to be sought in the north, where one may burst through the 'solar door' into Heaven. This is but one instance of a dual allocation of placements and a vital key to understanding the confusing position of Kalypso at west and south, for example, and Circe at east and north, a problem which will be addressed in coming pages.

The fact of the matter is that in any solar-based definition of space, movement between cardinal points must be allowed for in view of the Sun's seasonal changes of position. As we have remarked, movement is a function of cosmic time, in consideration of which those critical points on the ecliptic of most relevance to man become liminal places, literally so since identified by the symbolism of gates, doors and thresholds; but they are also to be considered liminal in a dual sense, in that the crossing of the threshold carries the subject from one world to another and from the condition of mortality ('temporality') to the immortal condition where all is timeless.

Paths and Gates

In defining the solar role of Circe and investigating Homer's Cave of the Nymphs, it will become apparent that the home of the gods lies to the north and 'above' and both the Underworld and the abode of men (in relative terms) are to be presumed to the south or 'below', as the Hindu tradition proposes. For the Hindu the spiritual path of enlightened men leads the faithful northwards along the *devayana*, a narrow and perilous 'path of the gods' passing over the mountains "beyond Kailash", towards Mt. Meru, the Hindu equivalent of Homeric Mt. Olympos. The south rather than the west was Hell and the land of the dead for the Hindu, but it was not associated with sin or permanent death: south represented a far more positive aspect, namely a location for return to life along a northward way. This quarter, for many reasons, admirably matches the fragrant abode of the goddess Kalypso from which the hero will eventually make his way to the liberating country of the Phaiakians.

A supra-mundane north is never far from Indic thought. At the setting up of a fire altar, the worshipper is advised to face towards the north-east, for that is where "the gate of the world of Heaven" lies, and this is the gate that makes him enter into the world of divinity.[47] Gates and doorways, we shall discover, also mark the staging posts in Odysseus' travels where he is to prove a master locksmith in the opening of the way. But first we must

be sure of some basic terms of reference and the inner meaning of certain significant objects before we launch him on his circular journey

CHAPTER FOUR

SEA, OCEAN, SHIPS, ISLANDS AND MOUNTAINS

Sea and Ocean

In the opening page of this book, the idea that Homer's "wine-dark sea" was the night sky was given a tentative mention. Now is the moment to recall that descriptions of the Heavens involving wine and the sea are not an exclusively Greek occurrence. In Hebrew, *tarshish*, the sea, carries several secondary values: it may name far-off lands, or a blue-green gemstone worn on his breastplate by the Jewish High Priest (we may compare Agamemnon's own magnificent breastplate and the shield where "a knob of dark cobalt" sits "in the very centre" *Iliad* 11, 19-35; 35), but *tarshish* also names the open sea itself, and this is its principal meaning; but its origins have been traced to a root *trsh*, derived from *tirosh*, wine; and Coptic gives *trosresh*, 'red'.[1] *Psalm* 46, verses 4-5, takes the assimilation even further, linking the 'raging of the sea' with metaphors evoking the bubbling fermentation of new wine.[2] Moreover, both *tarshish* and Homer's *oinops* or "wine-faced" (21, 144) are elsewhere attested as personal names, in this case a dark red, apparently an ideal colour for men. Among the Hopi people of America the night sky was given a positive character as 'a dark purple light', a seeming contradiction but one which interprets the inherent life of a seemingly dark and empty space.

Here, a broader distribution of a cryptic phrase in ancient Mediterranean tradition points to a more specific concept than can be deduced from a literal reading of Homer's *oinops*. What is more, Babylonian and Hebrew literature has a great deal to say about a 'cosmic sea' which does not appear in the Homeric texts, but cannot be totally excluded.[3] A cosmic wine-dark sea would go far to help resolve the poet's contradictory geography.

Primordial Oceans

Water imagery plays an important part in all cosmogonic symbolism, where it functions as a powerful exemplar of the dark, threatening and formless medium in which savage monsters may prey upon the unwary. Also, 'water' commonly represents a world existing before the time when chaos was given ordered form, yet at the same time it is the elemental substance most necessary to life. With this in mind, what, precisely, is Homer's Okeanos or for that matter, his *thalassa* or *pontos*? Both the latter can be ascribed safely enough to our world's oceans or lesser seas, but Okeanos is a case apart. In the *Iliad*, Homer names his Okeanos (of "enormous strength") as the source of "all rivers… and the entire sea / and all springs and all deep wells have their waters of him" (21, 195ff.), a catalogue suggestive of a very great, perhaps the single, originating source of the waters of our planet. On the other hand, the ancient *Etymologicum Magnum* which first appeared c. 1150 CE[4] as a compendium of Greek etymologies drawn from multiple sources, lists Okeanos as 'Heaven'.

This is enough to indicate that some attention must be given to the cosmic or primordial sea from which, in other cultures, all shapes and forms derive. This is the sea spoken of in the first book of *Genesis* (verse 2) when "the Earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Only then was light brought into existence, with the firmament which divided the waters above from those below (verses 6-7) finally becoming 'Heaven'. Once the waters under the Heaven were gathered together, God permitted dry land (Earth) to appear (9-10).

In Vedic literature an equivalent act of Creation involved the release of waters that had been held back in the Rock or Mountain that is equally the root place of the Tree of Life and an inexhaustible well providing the fertilising rivers of life (cf. *Genesis* 2,10: "And a river went out of Eden…"). The Rock of the *Vedas* stands at the centre of the universe in the midst of the primordial ocean,[5] just as the first primeval mound rises out of falling flood waters of the Nile in the Egyptian cosmogony. The shapeless lower ocean rocked the god Vishnu on his couch of serpents at the 'navel of the sea', and the same sea generated the primeval birth of an egg, or lotus, reed or island as 'first forms'. In the Vedic system the upper waters are identified with divine beings or Universal Spirit, and the condition of bliss which may be known as Heaven, Nirvana, or Tao. Cosmogonic legends such as these are necessarily the foundation upon which later myths describing the first gods and men and their relationships are based, since there has to be a prior act of creation to provide a scenic

backdrop to the unfolding of the manifested world. It is therefore possible that the designation of the Heavens as Okeanos, or a sea, was an early attribution which has been obscured and confused by later elaborations to the mythology.

We will take some time to pursue this point since it is central to our thesis that Odysseus travelled the Heavens, not the oceans. The islands to be explored function in the same way as those split mountains which open the (spiritual) way to the seeker, that seeker after truth who floats through a sea of infinite possibilities (i.e. a space containing potential life forms) which gives an image of infinite space. The journey takes the voyager 'upstream' to the source or 'downstream' to the sea or over the waters to the farthest shore, in vertical or horizontal movement corresponding respectively to the *axis mundi* or the plane of the Earth.

Okeanos might suggest 'ocean' but in the epic context it appears to be a belt or river surrounding the Earth (10, 508, 511; 11, 13-22).[6] Among its qualities are strength, constancy and occasional placidity. "Deep-flowing", "untiring", "without billows", or "flowing back on itself" are the recurring epithets attached to the name. Of these, the terminology of 'recurrence' or 'backward-flowing' has caused the most difficulty to commentators attempting to imagine such an action by a world-encircling river or a mighty ocean. It is an idea generally rendered in art by the *ourobouros* snake which encircles the globe, tail in mouth, a 'cosmic' serpent seen in many early figures.

Homer's Okeanos (both as a god and a celestial river) has now gifted his name to the world's 'oceans', leaving a huge gap in our understanding of the original concept, while further confusion arises from the overlapping roles of Okeanos and Eridanos and all other rivers said to emerge from the great original. The problem is that Okeanos is markedly different from the seas or oceans as we know them. But by a change of emphasis taking as a point of departure the knowledge that Okeanos marks, or includes, a place where the Sun rises and sets (*Iliad* 8, 485) Okeanos can be recognised in its role as a boundary of time and place. This corresponds to the use of Okeanos as a geographical frontier between worlds (such as a band delimiting Earth from cosmic sea), or it may be, between other cosmic phenomena. Even more usefully, Homer suggests elsewhere, in the *Odyssey*, that it is capable of stimulating life by means of those westerly breezes so refreshing to the inhabitants of the Elysian Fields (4, 562-568). Where Elysium is concerned, the life in question cannot be exclusively the life of this terrestrial existence. Again, the personification of Okeanos as a god sometimes portrayed in funerary scenes[7] on Roman sarcophagi reinforces the possibility that Okeanos has

had a traditional role to play in assisting the soul in the crossing of those very boundaries. Indeed, since such sarcophagi and even the famous Portland Vase carries among its many figurative details the head of Okeanos, it has to be wondered whether "the stream of Ocean" named by Homer is also associated with a way to life after death. It may be relevant that where, on the Portland Vase, a Tree of Life burgeons from a doorway, the head of Okeanos the sea god is seen at the very crown, as if to associate tree, ocean and door with upward movement.

The plastic evidence from the Portland Vase shows that Okeanos as 'a source of all life' may at some stage have directed the thoughts of a later audience towards the possibility of their own immortality and that of the loved ones whose ashes were deposited in this costly artefact. In the eschatology of this later (Roman) culture, the way to an Afterlife was apparently connected with a voyage across the sea, or whatever watery body Okeanos represented at that time. Okeanos, it seems, had a role for the Romans not only in generation but in re-generation.

Greek ideas are perhaps not entirely different, for it is "down misty pathways where recurrent Ocean empties / his stream" that according to Penelope the Homeric dead are destined to fall (20, 61-65), much as does the Sun at evening. It will be remembered also that leaving Circe, Odysseus must cross the stream of Ocean to beach his ships on the shore (10, 508-512) and on his return to Circe's isle he must leave the Underworld and the Ocean river ("*potamoio…Okeanoio*") to cross "the sea's waves" once again (12, 1-3). These, the opening lines of book 12, provide the clearest evidence that Ocean's river is not the sea (nor "the sea's waves") but something quite distinct. It cannot be irrelevant that both the hero's journey to Hades and his return followed a pathway defined by "the Ocean river".

The Order of Creation

Creation legends dealing with the emergence of land from the primeval waters are related by Hesiod as well as by Homer and the authors of Egyptian and Babylonian cosmogonies. In nearly all cosmogonic myths an initial event sparks off a division of land and sea and the gradual ordering of the planet into an equable system. Hesiod, for example, gives us Earth, Olympos and Hades (three planes) as the primary division of space, all born out of Chaos (*Theogony*, 116-120). Subsequently, he says, Earth first bore Heaven then the hills and mountains, before giving birth to "the fruitless deep"… "without sweet union of love" (133f.). As it is placed in the familiar context of hills and mountains, this sea is most likely the salty

deep engendering the various seas of our planet. "Deep-swirling Oceanus" is the next offspring of Earth and Heaven, according to Hesiod (135f.), now without any pejorative comment. As noted above in the account of Odysseus' homecoming to Circe (12, 1-3) a distinction is implied between a barren, unproductive sea and Okeanos. For Hesiod, sea and Okeanos had separate conceptions, and by implication the generation of Okeanos was a finer act which confers a superior cosmic ranking upon Okeanos. It will not however have escaped the critical reader that 'Heaven' had already come into existence before sea or Okeanos. The *Theogony* relates a chronological sequence of creative acts naming first 'Heaven', then 'Seas', then 'Okeanos', a crucial matter to which we shall return.

Okeanos as a god, together with his wife Tethys, functions as *theon genesis*, a "begetter of gods" (*Iliad* 14, 301f.) a personification wherein Okeanos exercises a procreative function not easily accommodated to a "barren" medium such as the salt sea expanse containing far lesser life-forms. Somewhere, it appears, the truth is once again obscured by metaphor. It has been noted that the sea, like all water imagery, lends itself to an enormous body of figural speech relating to form and formlessness, being and consciousness; hence 'journeys over water' often take on Afterlife connotations due to the hazards of passing through the formless into the formal order where equilibrium reigns. In the midst of the formless the traveller searches for a sure footing that will enable him to walk safely, if at all possible, 'on water'. A path or a bridge would be ideal as long as he is able tread it without falling back into the formless. It remains to find an adequate and appropriate path into the great beyond.

In numerous ancient Babylonian and Hebraic sources, a number of readings indicate that a cosmic, world-encircling sea was both recognised in the Near East and recreated in temple precincts by the installation of artificial lakes, or sometimes, as at Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, by a great basin of bronze. Etymological evidence linking Hebrew *'epes* ('end', 'extremity', i.e. of the Earth) with Akkadian *apsu*, abyss,[8] indicates the possibility that the cosmic sea is a dark surrounding area, a 'well of waters' nourishing the Earth, but capable of threatening it, unless held back by a retaining stone such as the foundation covering the Tehom (abyss) lying under the temple in Jerusalem. In this latter case, Okeanos, in some form approximating to a river, is imagined to be capable of flowing from the darkness of the cosmic sea and breaking through an aperture at the ideal centre of the world (Jerusalem as *omphalos*-centre). Such a state of affairs allows Okeanos to be potentially both a cosmic ocean (that is, a distant firmament) and an in-rushing river, or the source of one.

Is Okeanos the Milky Way?

Homer's Okeanos provides life, is the source of freshwater rivers, and is a closed circle. These unambiguously stated facts lead to a particularly strong cosmic candidate for the role of greatest among rivers: the white band of the Milky Way, not least because it is so often known as a 'river of souls' or 'way to the stars' in which each stellar body represents in popular thought, some being who once lived and died. At dawn the Way lies horizontally around our equator, just as Okeanos is often said to lie. On the other hand, within the greater galaxy (the arm of our Milky Way is only a part of the immense body of stars) lie the ecliptic circle and all the stars and planets that rotate around our Sun, including Earth; all visible creation is contained in the body of stars fixed upon the dark tent of the skies. So it is perfectly correct to imagine the Sun rising and setting at certain points of the ecliptic circle (as at *Iliad* 8, 485f. "dipped in the Ocean") which stands against the backdrop of the Milky Way - or Okeanos. Equally correct is the notion that the all-containing Way is a source of life, since it does indeed contain all visible cosmic forms upon which life depend, most especially in its resemblance to water. Those epithets speaking of a placid, deep and reversing motion apply more suitably to the Way than to any earthly sea or common river: for once the Way has circled the Equator in slow and stately fashion, it dips out of sight and returns to a vertical position, becoming a visible axis in the sky.

The Cosmic Ocean in Egypt and the Near East

Homer is aware of the tradition that names the Nile, "water of Egypt", as the "sky-fallen river" (4, 477f.; 581, *"dupeteos potamoio"*). A reading[9] giving *"dupeteos"* as 'flying' puts a new complexion on matters, although whether the Nile waters derive from a river which 'flies' or 'descends', the terminology gives an excellent match with the fertile waters of the Milky Way which 'fly' across the night sky and can be seen to 'fall' away below the horizon. Such a heavenly river features as a gift from the Sun god to other lands also, according to an Egyptian hymn from the tomb of Huy at Amarna:

> "…thou hast set a Nile in Heaven, that it may descend for them and make waves upon the mountains".[10]

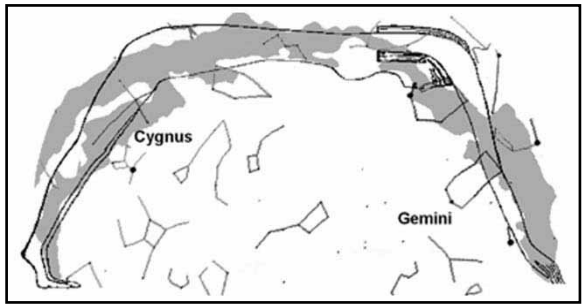

Figure IV-7

It would indeed be hard to claim that such a mighty celestial phenomenon as the Way belonged to Egypt alone. But, the sceptic will ask, is the water in question no more than the rain that falls from the skies onto every land, draining off the mountains to feed the Earth? It is unlikely. Rainfall is scarce in Egypt and the Nile provides generously for most needs.

Therefore not a common, small-scale feature such as regular precipitation, but a cosmic water-source is the most likely contender for the title "Nile in Heaven" named by the Egyptians.

In the Babylonian Creation epic, *Enuma elish*, before there were any gods, there existed Apsu, "abyss", "sweet water, the first begetter" (lines 1-6) and Tiamat, his consort who was the "bitter water". These, like Okeanos and Tethys, were the progenitive creator gods of all who followed. Tiamat was also known as Mother Hubur, Mother River. Since *tamtu*, the name of the Milky Way, is so similar to Tiamat, there is a case for identifying the first mother with the Way. Moreover, as a horned and tailed cow-goddess Tiamat falls into line with the many other cow-goddesses of Egypt, such as Hathor, Isis, and especially Egyptian Nut, the sky, whose body is adorned with stars but in whose arching posture a zoomorphic form of the Milky Way is seen at night (figure IV-7). In Greek myth, it is the spilt breast milk of Hera which provides the stars of the Way. (The Milky Way as a human female, as a cow or a source of fertilising water or milk has long been the celestial source of great waters in many cultures, the best known being the Ganges of India). Tiamat gives birth to twins whose snake-names indicate they are serpents,[11] for serpents and water share rippling characteristics and are mutually represented by a wavy line, so the serpent children of Tiamat may be understood as Tiamat herself 'doubled' into her horizontal and vertical appearances. Here may lie the meaning of the conquest of Tiamat by Marduk when, in a primeval

battle, he split the chaos-monster in two and established a new cosmic order, with the two shells of her body fixed in the heavens.

The snake as a representation of the Way also occurs in some Mithraic cosmology which will be examined here, in later pages.

'Femaleness', indicating fertility or longevity, and serpentine attributes, are especially important to an understanding of Milky Way iconography. The Way has 'two legs' where the main body of stars divides into 'two rivers'. It also has two, nightly, visible manifestations, as we have previously said, an approximate north-south alignment with the meridian, and an east-west appearance approximating to the Equator at dawn. In any of the configurations, it 'quarters' the sky in the course of the night as it moves diagonally from one position to the other. The constellations which lie at the ends of the Way swing about our globe in a fixed oscillation which raises first one then the other end to prominence, which is why one set of Tiamat's twins, Anshar and Kishar, mean respectively 'high' and 'low'. Their usefulness to the cosmic scheme of things is the result of their relationship to those equinoctial points marked by their heliacal risings and settings, to be read against the line of the Milky Way. These Babylonian twins are said to engender another god, Anu, whose name "shining one" fixes his place in the "yoke of the wagon star" and marks him as the Pole Star of the north. He will be the great sky god and symbol of Heaven itself. The son of Anu, however, Ea (Sumerian Enki) lives at the source of two waters which are rendered iconographically as the waters flowing from two jars held in the arms of the man-god. This could well mean that he dwells at the junction of the two legs of the Milky Way, the centre point where the waters flow in opposite directions. The placement of the heaven-god (Anu) at the north polar star and his opposite who must be the Underworld-god (Ea / Enki) at the junction of the two rivers of the Way gives two stellar locations for the Heaven-Hades opposition which can profitably be tested against the Homeric system.

The Cosmic Ocean in the *Vedas*

In Indic tradition the sea or ocean is the cosmic space between this world and otherworlds. It also serves a metaphysical function as the 'sea of life' on which the hero, the warrior or one made worthy by good works or sacrifice may ride the upward path of the *pitriyana* into the heavens. Like Jacob's ladder, this is a way between worlds. Manu is the king and guardian of tradition who survives one great World Age and who, at its end, riding in his ship or ark just like Noah, is carried aloft by the rising waters of the flood and deposited on the peak of a Himalayan mountain,

just as Noah made landfall on the mountains of Ararat. The *Atharva Veda* (6. 28. 3) tells how Manu's brother Yama first found the way many would later follow and crossed the seven 'steeps' or 'planes of being' which are the three worlds and the four layers of Heaven; at each he was obliged to make a crossing at a ford, *tirtha*. In some instances, the imagery adopted relates to a sea voyage and successive 'ports of call' where the mariner 'puts into harbour', ties up with a 'golden hawser', or even ties his ship to a tree. Crossings and fords as points of spiritual transition will be investigated in later chapters.

The gist of the matter is that a voyage across the sea of life is horizontal only until the moment when the traveller enters a new state of being, at which point he may rise by degrees into another world or on to a new plane, the horizontal having become a pitched slope. The way of the *pitriyana* (Way of the Fathers) does not consist in a straight line, but describes instead a moving spiral which circles and rises around a centre which is the vertical *axis* or Tree of Life.[12]

The ancient *Rg Veda* speaks of not one but seven rivers of heaven formed from the great ocean and personified as goddesses. In her detailed exploration of the several forms of the Indian Great Goddess, Stella Kramrisch has described one of them, Sarasvati, as rushing and roaring out of the mountains of stone which imprisoned her (in the celestial vault?) from the furthest land beyond, where the Fathers live with the god, Yama, under an evergreen tree, at the water source.[13] The tree is the Tree of Life, associated with suffering and timeless wisdom. So here, to be noted for further reference, is a celestial home of worthy men associated with the base of the axial tree as well as a water source or spring.

It is equally possible to follow another goddess-river across the cosmic ocean of the Vedic skies to find hints of a defined 'landscape of the Afterlife' among the stars. This time it is Sarama, the messenger and agent of Indra, who undertakes to rescue the "cows" and "horses" and other treasures symbolising 'light' from the cave of the robber-demons, the Panis. This cave is in a mountain, "paved with the rock" (*Rg Veda* 10. 18. 7) far away on the other side of the 'Rasa', at "the ends of heaven" (10. 18. 5). (We will come back to the Rasa). The Panis could not persuade Sarama to stay with them, but she accepted refreshment in the form of a cup of milk. After she had seen the cattle, drunk her milk and crossed back over the Rasa to report her findings to her master, she made the mistake of saying she had not seen the cattle. Indra knew better, and in his rage struck her a blow which caused her to regurgitate the milk. When she returned to the Panis, she was followed by Indra in his chariot along the trail of spilled milk.[14]

By these tokens the path to the cave of the Panis can be none other than the Milky Way, and Sarama is its embodiment. She is, at the same time, an embodiment of cosmic order in so far as she insists that the unfettered "cows", 'Light', should leave the cave "by the right way ("*rtena*") according to the order in the universe."[15] Coming together here are several factors: the light of the universe, described as trapped by hostile forces in a dark mountain cave, is accompanied by an insistence upon the restitution of light in the interests of cosmic order; the path to be followed is probably the great *axis*. There is a definite suggestion of precessional myth here, but this need not detain us. The main question is the identity of the helpful Rasa, which proves to be a great river flowing "around the world" (9.41.6) in a great circle. Clearly, if Samara is the Milky Way, the River Rasa is something other; it must be another circular phenomenon. For Indic scholars such as Kramrisch, the Rasa is the ecliptic circle itself which 'flows' around the Earth, carrying the Sun, its Moon and other revolving planets along the course of the Zodiac which marks the twelve houses of the Sun.

Embedded in the meeting of Sarama (Milky Way) and Rasa (ecliptic circle) is a point in time, and a place, when and where the Way crosses the path of the Sun. When the Way formed a vertical north-south path across the night sky, and when the vernal equinox was in Gemini and its autumnal partner in Sagittarius (in the Golden Age, 4,500-4,000 BCE), the Way met the ecliptic and formed a crossroads on the equatorial plane at the time of the autumn equinox. Sarama, the great Way, then crossed to her other bank and followed the opposing river of the two which make up her body. There she finds the cave where her 'cows' and 'horses' and her 'treasure' are enclosed (*Rg Veda* 1.62.3) which is thereby confirmed as the cavernous home of the Panis in the underworld or undersea home of the demon spirits where they kept the light 'imprisoned' (just as Helios threatened to do when he raged at the consumption of his cattle by the sailor companions of Odysseus). Once the cattle (who may reasonably be called the Vedic equivalent of Homer's "Cattle of the Sun") had emerged from their cave, their next steps as the light of the ascending Sun would have carried them on the return path upwards to the spring equinox in Gemini. Later pages will elaborate on the possibility of the path of the great goddess as a model for the path of Odysseus in his journey from the home of Circe, to the dark entrance of Hades and finally, to the fertile cave of Kalypso, and thence, return to Ithaka.

The River Styx

Another text, the *Jaiminiya Bramhana* (2. 440) describes how the Rasa helped Samara to cross its body by lifting her across a ford to the other side, where the treasure cave lay on the opposite bank. (Presumably the 'lifting' was achieved by the solar passage of the Sun along its fixed course). Now the story picks up on the common mythologem of the 'crossing of the stream' to the Otherworld, which for the Greeks is the black river Styx on which the most terrible oaths are sworn by the gods, perhaps because it is the river of death which the souls must cross into the Afterlife. The eldest, hence first born daughter of Okeanos, the river Styx, was generated from a place "vaulted over with great rocks", surrounded by silver pillars reaching up to heaven, as Hesiod relates in his *Theogony* (775-779; 786-79). Closer reading of the passage reveals that the "famous home" of the goddess Styx, "loathed by the deathless gods" (759) lies "by the gates of strong / Hades" (757f.); and, moreover, the chilly water of her river "trickles down / From a high and beetling rock." (785f.) Such talk of heaven and high precipices which strongly suggests a high place in the sky for this daughter of Ocean is supported by subsequent lines which describe the Stygian river as a branch of Ocean itself, one tenth of the whole of a great backward-turning stream which winds about the Earth (787ff.). "But the tenth flows out *from a rock*" (792f. emphasis added), says Hesiod, who goes on to specify that "the eternal and primaeval" ("ogygian") water of Styx "spouts through a rugged place." (805f.). By viewing such factors as a reflection of the visible geography of the sky and an astronomical vision embellished with more mundane architectural details, it is possible to imagine Styx as a resplendent goddess, and potential river, like Sarama and Sarasvati, in a palatial dwelling under the hard, rock-like carapace of the vault of the heavens, which is sustained by the silver pillars of World Columns; this will be the high place from which her dark 'water' flows down. A star-gazing mortal would be able to identify the home of Styx by location of a 'rock' or star which is one among many stars, for this must be the sense of the lines which confusingly juxtapose "a rock" with "the rocks". For this reason a strong case may be made for identifying a particular star in a recognised star group as the home of Styx at the head of the Dark Rift (or 'river') which begins at the star Deneb in the constellation Cygnus, in the cleft of the Milky Way. Having seized upon such an image, the subsequent attribution, to the same point in space ("And there, in all their order…" *Theogony*, 807) of "the sources and ends of the dark Earth and misty Tartarus and the unfruitful sea and starry heaven, loathsome and dank" identifies the vaulted home of the Styx as

the point of beginnings ("sources") and endings ("ends") of all three planes, Earth and Sea as the middle plane, Tartarus as the lower, and Heaven as the highest. Gloomy "Chaos" surrounds the three-planed entity, we learn, and this is where the Titans live (814f.). Styx, it would seem, is none other than a Greek (and later, Roman) equivalent of the river Sarasvati who "rushes and roars" out of the rocks of her stony cavern where stands the evergreen tree of the fathers, "in the great beyond". She provides an axial path, taking her beginnings from the central *omphalos* of the sky, birthplace of all. An offshoot of Styx, the river Kokytos, flows (according to Circe) into Acheron where a rock is to be found, at the junction of two thunderous rivers (which are unnamed, 10, 513-515). Both the epic of Homer and Vedic literature seem to be envisaging a place where death in the form of black Styx or the light-thieving Panis and its opposite, life (Afterlife 'on the other side'; cattle and light released) emerge from a cave-like place lying in or near a point where 'rivers' converge. In both cases, as we shall see, both Homer and the Vedic poet are projecting a place of spiritual transformation which lies in a cave, to which, or even from which, the combined ecliptic and Milky Way provide the path. That this mysterious place is south, in respect of the north-south axis, or, as in the case of Kalypso's cave, at "the navel of the sea", is underlined by Virgil in the *Georgics* (1.242f.) where he speaks of two opposite poles: "One pole is ever high above us, while beneath our feet is seen the other, of black Styx and the shades infernal." A situation where both a 'path into death' (presumably the Styx) and a 'path into life' may emerge from the same transformative cave (lying by the bend of the river, or its divergence into two rivers) can be explained as paths flowing contrarily, one from centre to south ('death') and the other from centre to north ('life').

It is readily admitted that opinions will vary as to the possible import of such a meeting of river and cave, at a ford or crossing, and subsequent passage 'into the light'. I would however like to propose that, on the strength of the story of Samara's adventure as a possible didactic model, the path into the next world follows first the path of the ecliptic (Rasa) until it meets with the path of the Milky Way. Once this crossing point is gained at the appropriate time, the deceased will find himself on the banks of the ecliptic river, or the Way, at a 'Gate of the Sun'; it will then remain for him to ford the river and to enter the cave. And if the Tree of Life has its roots in or near the cave he will find himself in the company of the righteous 'Fathers'. The Styx is clearly not the ecliptic, but it could be arising in the long dark space between the two 'arms' or 'legs' of the

Milky Way, its two rivers, precisely at the central division where a dark, visible cave marks the centre of our galaxy.

Some important considerations arise here. If, as surmised, the *Odyssey* is drawing upon some early pan-European sources shared with the authors of the early *Vedas*, we have found a likely antecedent to the transformative sea or ocean ridden by Homer's questing hero; his islands will be recognisable as markers of those crossing points or fords identified by stars, where, putting into harbour, he confronts one terrifying agent of trial and judgment after another, all intent on testing his worthiness to proceed to a higher level. Nor will the association of the sea journey with the great deluge or flood which marks the end of a World Age be overlooked, for later episodes will demonstrate the precessional relevance of the storms, fires and felling of trees featured in this epic, as well as the escape of vast bodies of water from 'a hole in the sky'. They mark out the sea voyage as an account of those violent changes accompanying the shifting of the world's centre. As for the *pitriyana* or Path of the Fathers, it will find a new role as the 'way of men' lying diametrically opposite the 'way of the immortals' in Homer's Cave of the Nymphs, close to the seashore on Ithaka.

The Orphic Fountain

An Orphic *Hymn to Okeanos* adds deeper perspective to the puzzle.[16] In view of the cosmological preoccupation of followers of Orpheus with the sky as the soul's favoured destiny ("I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven" announces one ancient funerary gold leaf) this hymn's address to Okeanos as "*terma philon gaies arche polou*" merits consideration. It is a difficult phrase, translatable as "beloved end of the Earth, ruler of the pole".[17] Additionally, *polos* is the name, in other Greek contexts, of the high elaborate headdresses of many gods and goddesses, and a possible link to the *axis* as line of communication between the deity and the heavens, in view of which the Orphic phrase may securely translate as 'the power (or principle) of the celestial vault'. In Thomas Taylor's translation, *arche polou* appears as "a friendly fountain". This is a watery but much reduced Okeanos leaving a sense of 'Ocean' as the source of a benign, gift-bestowing power, for which it is "beloved" by man. Perhaps it breaks through the stony vault of the sky just like the impetuous river Samara, who is the principle and form of cosmic order; but the phrase also invokes the birth of the Styx from a rocky cave in the sky which is identified by Hesiod with "the ends and springs" of Earth, Heaven and Tartarus.

This digression on the Milky Way has opened some interesting possibilities, first among which is the identity of Okeanos as a river of stars surrounding the Earth, or the circular flow of time represented by the great ecliptic, or the two in collusion. The Way can also be seen as an *axis* route touching Earth, arching to Heaven, while its 'swinging arm' terminates in constellations seen as twinned bodies, which in the Vedic story are the houses of Gemini and Sagittarius. (There will be much more to say regarding this 'arm' in a later chapter devoted to Circe and Kalypso, who share certain 'twin-like' characteristics). Lastly, the Way identifies a centre point associated with fertilising waters.

"Backward Flowing"

The enigma of Okeanos' contrary stream which "bends back in a circle", *"apsorhoos"* (*Iliad* 18, 399-403; cf. *Theogony*, 773) can be also be clarified by reference to two great circles: the visible cosmic phenomenon of the Way and the path of the Sun. It is after all extremely difficult to imagine any body of water which turns entirely back on itself unless it is through the tidal action of the seas or the swirling of eddies and whirlpools. The first option, tides, is large-scale and little known in the Aegean, and the second is a relatively minor phenomenon. In the case of the Way, however, there is a vast undulating body which falls away over the horizon and later reappears, not where it first emerged, but at right angles to the earlier sighting. At some point the expected circular motion appears to have been interrupted and the body of water, or body of stars, has turned back on itself by at least ninety degrees.

This interpretation makes sense of Hephaistos' description of the home where Euronyme ("daughter of Ocean") sheltered the ancient blacksmith after his "great fall". He worked for her and the goddess Thetis in "the hollow of the cave, and the stream of Ocean around [them] / went on forever with its foam and its murmur" (*Iliad* 18, 395-403). The mythology of the Milky Way frequently projects a place where the two rivers meet and pour their waters into a common pool (either at the crossing point of the Way's two separate appearances, east-west and north-south, or at the confluence where the Way splits into two); the result is a great foam, and inevitably the sound of a great cascade would be at very least a "murmur". Wrapped ("around us") within the winding river Ocean, is the cave where Hephaistos works, says Homer; and he may be telling us indirectly that the cave of the god lies in the dark space in the heart of the Way, at the Galactic Centre, where the waters divide.

The river which surrounds the home of Hephaistos does not turn back, or is not reported as doing so, but the two appearances of the Way suggest 'halt' and 'reversal'. That particularity may also be allocated to the ecliptic, which is subject to the gravitational pull which regularly shifts the Pole Star out of its position, and in so doing causes the rising of the morning Sun to occur in a neighbouring house of the Zodiac, not the next in due chronological order, but the one spatially preceding, so definitely a 'falling back'.

Given the obscurities of mythic language however and the lacunae in the stories we have inherited, we may never discover the full truth of Okeanos. But the search has not been without certain rewards.

It will be remembered that Okeanos has an offshoot, a 'son'[18] named Eridanos, "Early Burnt", who received the falling body of Phaethon. Subsequent mythology has on occasion identified the flaming path of Phaethon's fall with the ashy road of the Milky Way, while others see a connection with the solar ecliptic.[19] Eridanos is identified, like Okeanos, with a celestial 'river of life' flowing downwards from the heavens to nourish, spiritually speaking, the sacred rivers of Earth: Nile, Ganges, Po, Danube, Jordan, or the River out of Eden. This creates a confusing overlap of motifs suggesting that Eridanos, as a river so often imaginatively 'duplicated' on Earth, like Okeanos, is one and the same as his 'father' and only later fully or partially differentiated. And like his father, he finds an earthly embodiment in the imagination of Nonnos, who writes in the *Dionysiaca* (23. 380 ff.):

> "I will drag down from Heaven the fiery Eridanos whose course is among the stars, and bring him back to a new home in the Celtic land: he shall be water again, and the sky shall be bare of the river of fire."

This discussion has raised many possibilities, but not perhaps total certainties. We have not yet finished with Okeanos, however, and it will eventually become clear that both the ecliptic and the Milky Way are to be, under some aspect or another, frequent players in a drama of the evolution of the soul.

Sailing and Flying: Navigation to the Otherworld

That the stellar journey of Odysseus was undertaken by boat may at first seem surprising, until it is recalled how often ships or small boats survive in the archaeological record as essential transport for the dead. Viking and Saxon ship burials are well known in Northern Europe where they feature widely in rock art; and it may be that sea-going nations like

these Scandinavians and the Greeks, too, thought of death as a voyage into the Afterlife most suitably conducted aboard ship, as in life. The Egyptians who imagined a boat journey into the Afterlife were not sea-goers, but the Nile made freshwater mariners of them all, in spirit if not in fact; and the Babylonian lands likewise enjoyed the fertile Tigris and Euphrates as great waterways for navigation.

The ship in itself can be interpreted as a floating temple[20] or at the very least a simulacrum of a holy place. Its parts feature in the central cosmological section of Plato's *Myth of Er*, with its hull, underpinnings and mast the very image of a world held on an invisible axis.[21] Additionally, the art of the navigator involved the alignment of his ship with the stars, where the mast may well have served as an axial sight line, like a *gnomon*; the same practical seamanship allied to an imagined connection with heavenly bodies permitted an accommodation of ship and deity which saw the etymology of the nominative singular of temple, *neos*, overlapping the genitive singular of *neus*, ship, now reflected in the current use of nave (Latin, *navis*) in the Christian church. One further underlying link is that ships were seen as temples in which gods travelled, as they certainly did when statues were ceremonially transported over water; and where gods travelled, men were no doubt eager to follow in their wake, or in a similar vehicle towards the coveted land.

Writing of the significance in Egyptian imagery of 'sailing into the Afterlife', Jeremy Naydler comments that the boat itself is the symbol of the soul's ability to complete the journey.[22] It is necessary for the 'mariner' to construct his own craft, for each part has a symbolic value that must be grasped. This is most interesting in the context of Odysseus' skilled construction of his own raft, described in much detail in book 5 (235-262). The work includes the stitching of sails (258f.) which in Egyptian hieroglyph represent the wind or the breath; it is the divine breath which will sustain the traveller until he reaches the Underworld, which is an airless place. This windless condition may explain why the ship must so often be rowed or punted when close to the world of Hades.

Further similarities between the Egyptian journey into the Afterlife and the Odyssean imagery consist of the naming of the ship as a bird: "it flies, it alights" (quoting *Pyramid Text* 310; cf. 11, 125, where ships' oars are "wings") evoking the magical ship provided by the Phaiakians to carry the hero back to Ithaka. A heavenly river flows through the Field of Reeds just as through the Greek Elysium; but even more interesting is the presence of a "backward-glancing" helmsman in the Egyptian programme whose unexplained stance evokes the "backward-turning" river of Homer's epic Okeanos.

Homer's ships did not always rest on the waves. In the case of the Phaiakian ship mentioned above, it actually flew like a bird, or like a chariot drawn by mighty horses skimming the waves. The 'flight of the soul' through the heavens is also an Egyptian theme. When the junior priest Tuthmosis was working in an Egyptian temple he had a prophetic vision of Amun-Ra the Sun god, and knew he had been chosen for kingship. "He opened for me the portals of Heaven," he (or his scribe) relates: "he spread open for me the portals of the horizon. I flew up to the sky as a divine falcon…,"[23] which is quoted here as a reminder that metaphors of spiritual transcendence commonly use the imagery of flight to express the easy passage of the empowered soul. Souls regularly become migrating birds, winged *homunculi* or feathered angels, while messenger gods flit effortlessly between Heaven and Earth; and the shamanic seer first climbs, then flies, to a destination in the Underworld or 'Overworld'. Odysseus' final craft too, will 'fly' across the waters from Scheria propelled by the strong arms of the Phaiakian rowers. So flexible and adaptable is this imagery that a boat may 'fly' just as easily as it may 'swim', powered in this latter case by four stallions "lifting high their feet" so nimbly that their passage was swifter than the flight of a hawk (13, 81-88). Perhaps they are the four winds?

This happy resolution of the Odysseus' adventures hints at passage through the air. Whether or not the whole voyage entails idealised space travel, it seems to have ended in a manner which defies the laws of gravity. Here lies another hint that the 'ocean' or Okeanos is indeed part of deep space, and that the flight from Scheria to Ithaka was conducted initially by air and only latterly by sea to the safety of the final harbour where Odysseus 'comes down to Earth'. Of course this is no ordinary exploration of territory conducted by a would-be coloniser. It is a journey into death or at least a vision of trials and perilous conditions to be anticipated and prepared for. That is perhaps why the figure of the departed seen on the famous fourteenth century BCE Aghia Triada sarcophagus from Crete is offered a miniature barque during the funeral procession which honours him. In similar fashion, the solar barque is the privileged means of transport for the Egyptian Pharaoh and for the Sun, too, and many miniature boat replicas have been found in Egyptian tombs for the transport of the dead. Such ideas open the way to a consideration of Odysseus' journey as a maritime voyage across an airy cosmic sea in a vessel which, like the Pharaoh's, follows the path of the Sun: a journey, that is, which must follow the ecliptic path through the 360 degrees of the circle, taking in the crucial points of the solstitial and equatorial transits, if the traveller is to escape from the solar circle and penetrate deeper space.

The Sea Journey

The belief system which gives the most detailed account of an Afterlife solar journey 'by sea' was first set out in the *Pyramid Texts* carved on the walls of fifth and sixth dynasty pyramids of Egypt. By the time of the Middle Kingdom, c. 2100 BCE to c. 1700 BCE, even the coffin interiors of lesser mortals contained formulae and spells ('*Coffin Texts*') intended to aid the soul in a post mortem struggle to reach the blissful Field of Reeds. The coffin itself is a miniature model of the universe, with the sides denoting the four directions of space over which the four goddesses, Isis ('transition to life') and Nepthys ('transition to death'), Sekhet and Neith, preside. The ceiling represents the sky, and its base, the Earth. So the spirit of the departed begins his cosmic journey from a space symbolically approximated to the cave, the womb or the centre of the Earth, in essence an *omphalos* model referring to limits, directions and celestial goals. The ambition of the encoffined spirit is to 'become' Osiris ('Orion'), but first there are numerous ordeals to be undergone. The *Coffin Text* handbook enclosed with the departed contained advance information of the traps and demons that would lie in wait for the traveller, and one such text known as the *Book of the Two Ways* portrays two alternative routes by land or water, both leading to the domain of Horus. An important part of this guide contains information concerning the gates of the world beyond, particularly their keepers and the spells needed to pass them by. There is also the hazard of the psychostasy or weighing of the soul against the feather of *Ma'at*, 'Justice', to be encountered and overcome.

The *Book of the Dead* gives many details of Afterlife topography. Nevertheless, the eastern and western paradises of which it speaks are as old as the *Pyramid Texts*. In the west lies the Field of Offerings guarded by the Bull of Re, the Sun. In the east lies the Field of Reeds, originally a place of purification and rebirth and the starting point of the solar journey towards the western paradise of the Field of Offerings, but in time, both were to become joyful places where the soul might celebrate eternal life and enter into it. Also in the west lies the Mount of the Western Horizon (*Bakhu*), an invisible entrance door guarded by Horus, who is 'the door and the way' to life, as well as the only Opener of the Door. The soul must proceed in this direction, and (in later evidence) he will travel by boat. The door will close behind him. In between this single door and a double door to the east lie twelve divisions, which are the hours of night; as the Sun passes through this world of night (*Amenta*) it illuminates ('opens') each successive portal. The soul may finally emerge at the Mount of the Eastern

Horizon (*Manu*) via the double doors, ever-open and leading to the Field of Reeds or Rushes.

The solar barque will then have reached its point of first emergence but for some the journey is not yet done. There is an upper paradise in the north. The *Pyramid Texts*[24] record the Pharaoh's expectation that he will rise to become a star like those circumpolar bodies that never disappear from the horizon. First he will follow the solar path to be rejuvenated by the course of the Sun, but his ultimate destination is the Pole Star which never falls from sight:

> "I am a star which illuminates the sky; I mount up to the god that I may be protected, for the sky will not be devoid of me and this Earth will not be devoid of me forever. I live beside you, you gods of the Lower Sky, the Imperishable Stars. …"

It is apparent that the solar path is the preliminary stage and that the final stage of the journey, in this ancient culture, involves self-identification with certain stellar bodies viewed as "imperishable", that is, constant, not subject to vagaries of time. We can take from this Egyptian eschatology certain concrete elements, all of which are rich in metaphysical potential and which will be shown to belong to a similar soul journey for Odysseus.

They are these: gates, gatekeepers, solar paths, ships and water, Sun, stars (especially those in the north), geographical features, and cosmic background. Among abstract elements are found: journey, flight, and ascent, identity with the godhead, trial and justice.

As a system, the Egyptian paradigm is clearly discriminatory; and although increasingly democratic in that all men appear to have the same opportunities, it is the just, the fore-warned and the diligent who apparently succeed in overcoming the many dangers of the journey, including trial in the potent halls of justice. Implicit too is the thought that many will fail, for there would otherwise be no need of the process of judgment. Here are some indications of a structure which may well have been at the heart of Homer's philosophy, too.

Defining Place: Islands and Winds

Islands have in common with stars that they are surrounded with water in the first instance or with sky in the second. An illogical (but persuasive) principle is operative here, namely that if they have something in common they are at some level equal and interchangeable; there is no difficulty in substituting one for the other in a poetic context where metaphor holds

sway. The same may be said of the winds: if they come from a particular direction (they must come from somewhere) then they are fit to represent that point of origin. Broadly simplified into winds of north or south, east or west, their signification easily overlaps with the larger-scale cosmological and metaphysical roles of the directions. As the Sun sets in the west, it is to the west on an easterly wind that the dead must sail into eternity, so the road to the Land of the Blessed for those fortunate enough to gain it will also begin in the east. Access cannot always be direct, for that would eliminate the process of trial; the traveller will need to voyage through many directions on winds sometimes steady and kind or at others violent and inimical before gaining his objective. This is probably why Odysseus must cover all cardinal points and more if he is to close the circle of life. But as supernatural forces the winds have an affinity with the gods who rule the universe and send good fortune or bad; and since these deities can be powerful agents of change in the destiny of man, serious thought must be given to the symbolism of the various winds, storms and hurricanes encountered by Odysseus in the course of his journey. The symbolism of winds as natural forces needs to be addressed in the context of individual adventures where they will be treated as an element in a subtle code indicating stages in the soul's transformation.

It is no coincidence that the far points of east and west can be represented in the Egyptian system by paired lions, doors or doorleaves, twinned mountains or duplicated trees. Obviously one goes through a door; but Gilgamesh the Babylonian hero goes through not a wooden portal but the "twin mountains of Mashu" to reach the paradisal kingdom of Utnapishtim. At heart these accommodations are only possible because all belong to the polyvalent iconography of the idealised *axis* which opens the way from one world to the other: a door has two leaves; it opens on to a road or path; two mountains can equally create a 'doorway' to the 'path' that leads to Heaven.

The high places of the Earth must be considered in relation to the skies against which they measure their height and supremacy. The sky, as the home of sky gods and cosmic powers and the background to the ascent and descent of those forces, shares its sacred nature with the mountains at the same time as it acts as the focus of man's aspirations.[25] Accordingly the main symbolic function of high places concerns the meeting of sky and Earth at a central point where an axial connection may be projected between planes. Every culture has its sacred mountain, many of which are associated with the Pole Star marking the centre of the heavens. For these reasons a journey to a mountain, and especially a passage 'through' a mountain, must be considered a journey to the centre of Earth or sky.

When Hermes leads the souls of the dead along "mouldering pathways" to the Gates of the Sun lying close to the White Rock (24, 10ff.), his pilgrims come to a symbol of the way to eternity, paired door-leaves and another marker of the World Centre, the Rock.

In most of the hero's adventures, action unfolds in territories named as islands or in contact with similar features such as rocks isolated in the sea. But before beginning our review of these rocky places we need to be sure of Homer's terminology. In the following chapter a brief review of certain significant objects, places and people will give an oversight of the poetic system of allusion and analogy which draws upon the shamanic world view involving *axis* and *omphalos*. This will provide a valuable key to the poet's esoteric cosmology.

CHAPTER FIVE

OBJECTS WEAPONS AND PERSONS OF POWER

This century of ours, with its preference for empirical evidence over unsubstantiated speculation, finds it hard to believe that an inanimate object might carry within it a fragment of a great spirit, some *numen* or essence of the Creator. Yet evidence from enduring traditional societies suggests just that, so we must anticipate that the same ideas might have prevailed in ancient society and perhaps especially where shamanic-based religions held sway. Many of Homer's 'objects' appear to have a life of their own, none more so than the arrows and spears that hasten through the air to do the bidding of the warriors engaged in the great Trojan War.[1] In some ancient version of the pathetic fallacy, weapons are 'alive' to their owners and work together towards a single cause; but the energy or *mana* residing in the weapon of war or token of authority is of another order than the mundane, if the example of the oath issued against the sceptre of Agamemnon by his rebellious subject (*Iliad* 1, 233ff.) is any guide in the matter. It is, in the words of Achilleus, destined "never [to] blossom again". The source of kingly authority and its exercise is in some way linked to the universal force of nature, which is of course greater even than the strength of a king.

A system which recasts objects metonymically, with reference to another concept, has the advantage that it allows scenes to be told in many alternative ways; this is an inestimable gift to the poet, who in any case believes that he is inspired by the heavenly Muse. Using this possibility as a guide line, some other potentially sacred and significant objects which appear in Homer's texts are explored here as a prelude to an exploration of more developed cosmic material.

The Tree and the Sceptre

Iconographic evidence from Minoan Crete and the Mycenaean mainland convinced Sir Arthur Evans that there existed a Bronze Age cult of tree and pillar worship in early Greek culture.[2] This he was able to relate to similar practices and beliefs in neighbouring East Mediterranean lands. The archaeological and literary records of that region also testify to

the cultic importance of high places such as mountains, where sanctuaries were established; on the level plane, symbolic built structures such as pyramids, ziggurats and towers replicated the divine mountain and its axial function as a 'stairway to the gods'. Evans even came close to acknowledging the *axis mundi* principle informing these cults when he compared the Minoan examples with Yggdrasil, the great World Tree (or Tree of Life) of the Scandinavians, which has its roots in the Earth reaching down to the Underworld and its crown brushing the roof of the sky.

The Oracle at Dodona

The accuracy of Evans' instinctive association of the Greek pillar-tree with the later European myth of a Tree of Life may assessed with a brief examination of early tree cult at Dodona, founded, it is said, by Pelasgians and known to Homer and, of course, to Odysseus, who went to Dodona to listen to the will of Zeus, out of the oak tree (14, 327f.). It was a sacred tree with a wide reputation for oracular powers. This must hark back to some early animistic tradition establishing in-dwelling tree spirits such as dryads or other vegetation deities in certain remarkable trees. An important consideration would surely be the vigour, fertility and longevity of the tree, whether leaf-holding like the conifers, self-regenerating like the olive (a provider of oil *and* fruit) or long-lived, enduring for centuries, like the oak. In all events, the divinity 'informs' the power of the tree to the extent that even when separated from its parent, a branch or timber from the tree appears to retain its god-like powers. Zeus and Helen are among the gods sometimes named as 'of the tree', respectively '*endendros'* and '*dendritis',*[3] while a segment from the holy oak of Dodona implanted in the bow of the Argo by Athene reportedly endowed the ship with the power of prophetic speech.[4]

Tree-related Artefacts

With these mythic details in mind it is easier to understand the particular powers of man-made artefacts attributable, according to the sources, to origin in a sacred tree. Although the tree is universally renowned as the foremost exemplar of the *axis mundi,* there is no difficulty in transferring the same attribute to related forms, especially to strong verticals made from stone (which came to replace wood in status buildings), such as columns, obelisks and pillars, as well as some scaled-down miniatures, sceptres, swords, staffs and magic wands. Even the

human phallus takes on axial importance in the context of world fertility, where it is matched by the receptive female *vulva* or womb as its omphalic complement, and worshipped even today in some parts of India as representative of the life force in general. In related fashion, the spine is frequently seen to act as the physical conduit of spiritual power, and none more so than in Buddhist practice of *kundalini* yoga where *chakras* ('wheels' or 'centres') identify stages of progression in the raising of consciousness up the length of the spine. Egyptian iconography employs the Sun-reflecting, gold-capped obelisk as an *axis* form but this does not displace the axial sycamore trees at the world's edges, nor the sceptres or staffs held by the Four Sons of Horus who help their father rise again in the east ('Four Pillars of the World') nor the pylons of the ceremonial gateway, all of which function as allomorphs of the same fundamental concept.

The Sceptre and the Spear

Such background knowledge makes possible a fresh reading of the golden sceptre of Agamemnon's fathers, "immortal forever", *aphthiton* (*Iliad* 2, 46 = 186), which is sufficiently 'alive' to carry its own genealogy tracing it back to the forge of the god Hephaistos and ownership by the god Hermes, among others (100-108).[5] It even has a physical genealogy (we would say provenance) as a wooden sceptre owing its origin to a tree on a mountain (*Iliad* 1, 235), where the mountain reference reinforces the axial value of the tree, hence the mystical power of the sceptre carved from its wood. The narrative demonstrates that a bearer is recognised through possession of the sceptre status-symbol as one sanctioned (perhaps by the gods themselves) to exert authority as "lord of many islands and over all Argos" (*Iliad* 2, 108). This must be the very same sceptre carried in the administration of "the justice of Zeus" by the sons of the Achaians. Achilleus, in his wrath at the *un*-just betrayal by Agamemnon of a soldier's right to spoils of war, swears a great oath on the sceptre which effectively strips the token of office of its physical strength, never again to bear leaf, branch or flower, we are told (*Iliad* 1, 233-239). In effect, the oath intends to separate the artefact from the living power generated by the combined 'parent' mountain and tree. Achilleus foretells in the same breath the future ineffectiveness of the king in the face of Hektor's man-slaughtering army, which is indeed borne out by the numbers of the Achaian dead to fall on the plains of Troy (239-244). This however did not prevent the same implement from putting out shaded foliage over Mycenae, when (in the prophetic dream related in Sophocles'

Elektra)[6] it was planted in the *hearth* of the palace; but in this later drama the sceptre-*axis* is being reunited with a prime image of divine and domestic centrality, the hearth, source of the heaven-seeking, axial smoke of sacrifice, hence a major symbol of the cosmic *omphalos* or regenerative centre and point of emanation.

Achilleus has his own token of power, which is a spear cut from a mountain ash on Mount Pelion and given to his father Peleus as a gift from the gods. It is his alone, destined even to escape Hektor's theft of armour from the body of Patroklos; and, we are told, "no one else of all the Achaians could handle [it]." (*Iliad* 19, 387ff.). Achilleus, unlike his leader, fights honourably, "shining…like the sun" in a blaze of glittering armour (19, 398) under the 'fires of Heaven' which are replicated by the fires on the plains of Troy (19, 17; 21, 522f.). Here is an implied co-identity of the hero himself and the cosmic and terrestrial fires of above and below, which he mediates as he rages about the field. His status as an intermediary force is confirmed by the evening star which sits atop his spear (22, 317) and the fire which blazes from his head (18, 203-214). Thus we see that the spear, like the sceptre, may be a divinely empowered instrument, but so is man when inspired with godly strength, and the source of that power is in the head or the spine which (like the spear) align his body to the cosmic presence above. This is the hero whose shield portrays the entire cosmos (18, 468-607) and whose armour not only emanates celestial light but puts forth wings that sustain him and, by implication, 'lift him heavenwards' as they "upheld the shepherd of the people" (19, 386).

The Sign of the Oar

The same derivation could be argued for the oar to be planted in the ground of an unnamed country where men knew nothing of the sea. The poet of the *Odyssey* marks this object featuring in the prophecy of Teiresias as a very great "*sema*" (11, 126) in a rare instance of decoding (or invitation to decode) which means that it must be taken most seriously for its extra symbolic content. Since both oar and *stele* (grave stone) mark the burial place of Elpenor (12, 14f.), the oar "in the very top" (15) has a definite funerary function, hence it is potentially able to serve as an axial fingerpost 'showing the way' to the deceased and those who mourn him. The employment of a post to mark a grave site is extremely ancient custom traceable through the extensive symbolism which similarly binds the god and psychopomp Hermes to the wayside grave-cairn and boundary herm, as well as to the crossroads as a point of transmission between

worlds. India has a similar set of traditions relating most curiously to the sacred ant hill, where industrious insects burrow mysteriously for water far below their home; when man inserts a ceremonial post through their domain, the 'hill' becomes the *omphalos* to the *axis* and completes an ideal model of the three-layered cosmos; hence its sacrality.[7]

All these tree-derived wooden implements have an ancestry reaching back to the shamanic drum (female, uterine *omphalos*) and accompanying drumstick (masculine, phallic *axis*) which were harmonised in the music-making of the earliest practitioners of religion and magic. No ordinary tree could supply the wood for these artefacts, it seems; only a forest tree identified by divination to be a 'World Tree' could serve in a holy function.[8] Drum and drumstick could then function as instruments of flight to carry the shaman on his magical sky-journey through time and space to the original Cosmic Tree, which is also the Centre of the World. The skin on which he drums is frequently ornamented with simple representations of the cosmos, which include the tree and the stars, three planes of the Earth-Sky and Underworld and other axial symbols such as rainbow or bridge, the 'roads' which cross the heavens.

Time and culture move on, but not without preserving favoured symbols. The tree easily finds another incarnation in stone.[9]

Column and Pillar

With advances in craft and the making of tools, the simple wooden tokens derived from sacred trees could be replicated by work in stone, or the two could be combined, in, for example, the leaves of a wooden door set between stone pillars. The ease with which Homer can describe the olive tree bedpost in the home of Odysseus as both a quasi-living, rooted tree *and* a lifeless column (23, 190f.) demonstrates the early transference of particular values and associations from wood to stone, and the reverse. Evans has reminded us of the several shared and inter-changeable symbolic values of tree and column in his detailed article of 1901.

The importance of the household pillar is made clear in the very first book of the Epic when Telemachos places the spear of his divine visitor Athene against "a tall column" (1, 127f.) where other household spears are stored in a rack; the same column serves as the repository for Demodokos' lyre when it is not in use (8, 67). It can be imagined that both spear and lyre will need 'recharging' from the column as a 'divine connection'. The same or similar support of the house acts in the judgment of Melanthios (22, 193) and of the treacherous maidservants (465-473), together with extended similes involving birds, lines and snares not without symbolic

reference to the pillar as the Cosmic Tree. Since the cosmic tree or column reaches high into the skies it is inevitable that the birds that are so often the messengers of the gods should take up residence there. In fact, Aristophanes in his comedy *The Birds* has his avian characters speak of their tree as the 'pole' (*polos*), the "pole of the birds" which passes through the whole universe and lends power to men ("you will reign over mankind").[10]

The central pillar (or kingpost) of the house, whether cut from timber or cut from stone, is celebrated in many cultures as an axial replica which connects the household to the sky and the gods. For this reason it will be useful to give some thought to the role of the pillar in all the homes of palaces in the *Odyssey* and the characters who appear attracted to it, or consider their rightful place to be at its foot. Theirs will be a privileged position on the cosmic scale of things.

The Mountain

To some extent the pillar or column is a scaled-down version of the mountain, the two archaic images having reached a degree of accommodation on the basis that both function as a celestial line of connection; and inevitably the worked artefact represents or recalls the original stone, just as the sceptre harks back to the tree. The mountain is of course a magnificent natural feature, in size and beauty worthy of worship in its own right (as it is to this day among inhabitants of the great Asian ranges) but there is the extra, practical advantage in that man can climb his mountains or lesser hills and enter into closer physical proximity to the gods in the sky. That is where he will place temples and sanctuaries as homes for the divinities where both they and he can enter into dialogue, having reduced the space which divides them.

It will become apparent that the mountain as an axial symbol, as potent as the column or tree, will play a part in the journey of the hero, both as an obstacle to progress and as a marker of the levels of initiation achieved at various points of progress, or regression. But at this stage we shall merely note the universality of such ancient ideas associating the mountain with a route to the gods. Although contemporary or associated literature is to be quoted frequently in this context as the story progresses, we shall begin here with a glance in the direction of an ancient series of texts from central Asia known as the *Gesar Epic* which is at least a thousand years old but whose roots will have been much older. It contains traces of motifs familiar to students of Mediterranean mythology, such as the Clashing Doors ('Symplegades'); a Polyphemos-type figure; and a 'return' motif

which involves the return of the hero to his wife. (Homeric sources for the *Gesar* may be a possibility, but are not presently important to this strand of the argument).

A very old pre-Buddhist tradition describing a mystical 'Crystal Mountain' reappears in a Mongolian version of the *Gesar Epic*. Of special interest is the hero's passage across three mountains, one white, one yellow and one blue, which are revealed as the three planes of Heaven, Earth and Underworld. The hero eventually reaches a female figure who occupies the Crystal Mountain. (The mountains may be disposed vertically one above the other or arranged horizontally, but the association with the planes proves that this is a journey of ascent or descent in which the mountains represent constraining obstacles). With each crossing, the hero changes his clothing and armour, as a token of his change of status, each divestment marking his entry into a 'new condition of being'. The esoteric meaning of the journey is the striving of the soul to gain the Otherworld, which may be the world of the dead or the mountain of the ancestors, but in many cases the journey ends with the *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage, when the traveller is reunited with his beloved (representing 'Totality'), on the 'mountain of the dead' which is also the hill of creation.[11] Here is a complex bundle of motifs in which the reader may already be sensing the travails of Odysseus and the resolution of his journey with return to Penelope and Ithaka; the notion of an axial mountain will probably less familiar, but we intend to show the extent to which ascent and descent by axial means are crucial to an understanding of place and purpose in the *Apologoi* and Return.

Much more could be said on these lines, but as space is limited, we shall move on to consider the special place of man and his consort in this axial scheme of things. Since, as we have said, the upright spine is another form which lends itself to the symbolism of linear communication with the gods, it follows that the human male or female is capable of personifying that line of communication and acting in accord with the power that it grants. Man, woman and *axis* may function as one.

Hektor

The renowned Trojan hero, Hektor, was named by Pindar in his second *Olympian Ode* (verse 89) as "Troy's invincible pillar of strength" - surely the first known use of the metaphor to indicate a stalwart member of society, and although probably influenced by *Iliad* book 6, "Hektor alone saved Ilion" (403), the introduction of an equation 'man = pillar' is startling to those unacquainted with the associative process which exploits,

in the interests of figurative speech and subtle allusion, the inherent strength of hero and artefact. Pindar's metaphor claims that Hektor's strength in defending his city is analogous to the strength of a sustaining pillar. It is also possible that he shares not only the physical properties of the pillar, but (in this elevated context) the mystical associations of pillar as sustainer-of-the world.[12] But he is far from alone in his association with the *axis*-pillar.

Penelope and Others as Tree, Pillar or Mountain

By reason of this noted potential, the close association between Penelope and the domestic pillar in several scenes in the *Odyssey* [13] invites interpretation as a similar homologisation of the woman and the idealised *axis*. Several times, the lady of Ithaka makes a radiant appearance at the pillar of the house, the "*stathmos*" or 'kingpost', clad in her "shining" shawl or veil and accompanied by two maidservants, who are the equivalent of the two flanking figures invariably seen in *axis* iconography, where they express the expansion of the One into Many, i.e. the process of manifestation.[14] Her radiance may be a reflection of that great light attributed to the sacred pillar by Sir Arthur Evans, among others, and found in many examples in the iconographic record quoted by him,[15] or, it may, as we intend to show, express the visible light of a star or misty nebula which surrounds the cosmic home of the individual.

When speaking of the importance of the pillar in Odysseus' homestead, in an article issued one hundred years after the publication of Evans' interpretation, Egbert Bakker has pinpointed the cosmic values implicit in the linear connection associated with Homer's female characters in particular. He sees common ground in the paradisal homes of Penelope (pillars) and Kalypso (cave) and this he attributes to the universal symbolism of *axis* and *omphalos.*[16] The same writer quotes with emphasis the important article by Michael Nagler (1996) which records many examples of axial symbolism in Homer's *Odyssey* and links them with several multiforms of the same principle in the Epic.[17]

The identity of woman and tree is an ancient shamanic tradition as well as an animistic tendency which sees a living force in plant growth, and since tree and column share the axial function there is no difficulty in assuming a two-way overlap which makes a tree of the woman and a woman of the tree. For example, a Yakut shaman's tale has an ancient goddess emerge from the Tree of Life (with which she is one) and offer the 'water of life' to man.[18] A very similar portrayal of the tree or column

goddess is to be found in Egyptian depictions of Hathor or Nut emerging in whole or part in order to convey the food of eternity to the deceased.[19]

A logical deduction from these observations is that if a woman (or a man) may be poetically and artistically configured as a tree, then a fusion of human with mountain or any other axial form should be possible. And thus it proves. Penelope herself comes close to 'being' a mountain in book 19, line 204f., when her tears are compared with melting snows that run off the mountains, a conceit which succeeds in contrasting the beneficence of Penelope to the horrific Laistrygonian queen of the tenth book who was as "big as a mountain peak" (112f.), but far more inimical to the hero than his faithful wife. Whereas Penelope's 'axial' strength sustained (i.e. 'uplifted') the *oikos* and its inhabitants, the power of the Laistrygonians amounted to a capacity to consume, a cannibalistic 'swallowing' that fed the flesh of the sailors 'down' into the bellies of the enemy and 'down' into the waters of the deadly harbour. The roles of Penelope and the malefic queen are antithetical yet thematic, involving as they do the opposition of good and evil, the 'way up' and the 'way down' still played out in world religions where Heaven is above, and Hell, inevitably, below. They also exemplify the 'Two Ways or Paths' which are to be discussed as a major theme of the *Odyssey*.

On the island of Scheria, Alkinoös and Arete occupy a splendid palace fit for the gods. By its very magnificence it belongs to the same supernal category as the palace of Menelaos, the king who will at the end of his days be granted a place in Elysium. The husband of Helen must be as dear to Heaven as are the Phaiakian king and queen who boast of their closeness to the gods, for of Arete it is even said that her people "look toward her as to a god" (7, 71). One especially loaded, overt expression of her high status is her customary place beside the pillar. Closeness to the gods, or to the pillar, occurs frequently enough in Homeric discourse for it to be interpreted in the light of a particular suggestion from Mircea Eliade, namely that 'closeness' is a matter of being near to an omphalic point of the *axis*: that is, close to a mystic centre, for it is vital that a religious man should dwell close to the axial centre.[20] And since the *axis* can be artificially created by such artefacts as the domestic pillar, all that religious man needs to do to be 'close to the gods' is to make and respect the tokens of their presence.

Many parallels draw Arete and Helen into the orbit of Penelope (they are all weavers, they sit or stand by pillars, they are objects of admiration and / or desire) but the wife of Odysseus occupies a humbler home and does not ostensibly enjoy the same status. In spite of this, her hand in marriage is intensely sought after for reasons which in narrative terms may

involve matriarchal succession, the value of her property or, quite simply, her beauty - the source of the suitors' aggressive wooing of the queen is a much debated question. Nevertheless in view of the intensity of Odysseus' longing to be once again at her side on his own island, and his rejection of numerous opportunities for immortality, power, knowledge, wealth, or marriage to a younger woman, the passionate desire for *nostos* so often cited by the poet seems to belong to another, far less material order. And the role of the suitors as disruptive elements may also be understood on that metaphysical level which is so often enacted on the cosmic stage; they are to be seen as 'players' in a battle between good and evil converted into 'events' in the sky.

The cosmological motifs which provide the backbone of the *Apologoi*, as we shall interpret them, conceal an esoteric sense: they are neither 'mere' geography nor mere astronomy, they are both and more. So it is with Penelope, too, by virtue of her identity with the *axis*-pillar, her control of the storeroom where the doors groan like the bulls of heaven, her weaving and unweaving of the fabric of Time, and her knowledge of the *axis*-tree of the marital bedchamber. Even her weeping is of a scale and intensity beyond human capacity. These facts and a sense of Penelope's centrality to the resolution of the epic action are sufficient for this writer to identify her with the 'eternal feminine' and to claim for her the role of complementary female to Odysseus' male in the cosmic scheme of things, which has always decreed that creative manifestation of the first principle is a function of conjoined male and female forces.

Lions and Mountains as Gates and Cosmic Portals

If these interpretations seem somewhat far-fetched or ill-founded, the implications drawn out by the present writer are as nothing compared with the labyrinthine thinking underlying Egyptian symbolism. This, as we noted earlier, functions via a bewilderingly multiform and polyvalent play of sense and shape. It is a system which constantly turns upon itself and reinforces its inferences with scant regard to the conditions we should today call 'logic' or 'reality'. Superimposed forms create infinite subtleties of meaning using relative size, colour, position and inter-relationships between objects.[21] One object is, or stands for, or 'equals' another, and in any developed schema all parts will silently converse with their counterparts and neighbours (or at least, will do so for those attuned to the workings of the system). This, for a remarkably sophisticated culture, appears to have been the way higher realities are discovered and

expressed. A few examples will serve here to illustrate the multivalence of certain objects.

The horizon sign (figures V-8, a, b, c) resume many of the symbols described above and soon to be explored in the context of Greek poetry. Its most frequent components are two antithetical lions or two mountains, and between them a circle representing the Sun; but the Sun can be replaced by the sungod seated in his 'Sundoor' or 'Sun-window' of the third example. The base lines of the images portray the Earth's horizon or equator.

In (a), peaks or horns function as *axial* mountains or doors framing an enclosed *omphalic* space; in (b), the lions now express the *axial* element but their back-to-back disposition introduces a reference to time, i.e. 'Yesterday' (east, sunrise) and 'Tomorrow' (west, sunset), relating to the passage of the Sun between the axial markers.[22] Because of the time element, the image is able to refer to the life and death, initially of the Sun, but by extension, of man. The western gate shows entry into death, and the eastern, entry into life 'renewed'. In (c), we identify the same indicators of horizon, east and west, and Sun, but recognise that they are now configured as an open window having two shutters or leaves, in the manner of a door.

If we have lingered here over the symbolism of the Egyptian sundoor, it is in the hope of supporting future arguments concerning Odysseus' passage out of this world and into a higher realm, so the reader's patience is requested once again while we establish the door's potential to embrace other such cosmic imagery, such as divine guardians of the entry or exit, sunlight as an axial path, and the roles of east and west in the migration of the soul. Even then, we shall scarcely have plumbed the potential of the iconography.

Cosmic door imagery is extremely adaptable: it can explain the 'blind door' of Egyptian funerary monuments ('entry to the Afterlife') as well as the power of the temple doors of Egypt, whether one is faced with the great pylons of the main entrance (which 'are' also the goddesses Isis and Nepthys) or the inner doors leading towards the holiest enclave, or successive doors surmounted by the sign of the winged disk which mark the penetration of the Sun's rays in direct line from the pylon doors to the inner temple; this motif indicates the path of 'the light of Heavenly illumination' to be reached by passing through the successive portals.

In the eschatological scheme of things outlining the after-death journey, the western mountain-gate can only have one door leaf, which is closed, because it must be hard of entry; by the time the soul has passed through the trials of night in the underworld *Duat*, it will have earned the

right to pass easily through the open eastern gate with its *two* doorleaves. This is how heroes such as Gilgamesh are able to walk into the interior of 'twin' mountains (representing Sundoors) and pass through them to another land: it is an impossible logic, but symbolic sense. The Sumerians, in common with the Egyptians, placed their Underworld (*Kur*) at the base of mountain ranges marking the sunset point where the Sun fell daily from view.

Let us now see how Odysseus will fare in the course of his own epic journey into the unknown when he encounters the trials of violent seas and equally violent human and monstrous enemies. Many significant liminal places, including doors and thresholds, will mark out the sequence of his adventures as stages in a personal journey of self-discovery.

Figure V-8 a, b, c

CHAPTER SIX

ODYSSEUS AT THE CROSSING OF THRESHOLDS

In the gospel of Matthew, the disciple recorded the essence of Christ's teaching as it was delivered in the Sermon on the Mount. Among the advice given to the soul in quest of God, lines using the metaphor of door and way make a clear distinction between two possible soul-paths, one of which is easy to travel, yet associated with death, the other so narrow as to be obstructive; but the second is most life-giving:

> "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." *Matthew* 7, 13-14.

Homer's world image, his *imago mundi,* is never overtly stated but, as in the imagery used by Matthew, is concealed within subtle treatments of cosmic time and place, as a series of objects of a domestic or natural order. Columns, spears, looms, masts and trees, being linear in design, suitably express the vertical, and as a secondary effect, paired trees and columns may be employed to define the space allocated to a doorway. The thresholds or lintels of these spaces indicate the opportunity for horizontal movement through and beyond the aperture defined by the paired verticals. References to climbing a ladder or descending it are sufficient to indicate vertical movement in either direction. From these simple elements there evolves a language of transformation from which door and threshold emerge as elements of an easily absorbed metaphoric symbolism of entry and exit into the Otherworld. The pattern is successfully applied in many diverse cultures, and is no different in Homer's poetic canon.

Thresholds and Portals

The poet's Earth is enclosed by a great encircling river which he names 'Okeanos'. It serves as a frontier to the great unknown, or rather, the point where the known meets the unknown and where marvellous and magical places are to be found, at the very limits of the world, *'peirata gaies'*. It is

Hamlet's "undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns."[1] Where there are frontiers and boundaries to be crossed action takes on a transitional character: the subject is carried out of one condition and into another, in this case over a conceptual (or in narrative terms, an actual) liminal marker. The *limen* or threshold step worked in stone or precious metal, bronze or wood, so often named by Hesiod and Homer in their descriptions of the wider cosmos, aptly expresses the mystical power of such places, for such references to remarkably rare or precious materials[2] betray them as no ordinary thresholds. Indeed, for Hesiod the threshold has roots which go far below, "grown of itself" (*Theogony* 811ff.). If the step is remarkable, so must be what lies beyond the portal of the 'house', or in other words the wider place or condition to which it gives access. The most frequent allusion is to transition between life and death, in which the soul passes from one 'house' to another. The bronze threshold of the gates of Tartarus, for example, where Hesiod places the yawning mouth of hell (*Theogony,* 742f.) has a potential partner in Homer's "gates of Helios the Sun" which mark the journey of the dead along "the mouldering pathways" to "the dwelling place of souls" (24, 12-14). They are places of transition from one plane of existence to another, in both the physical and metaphysical senses. For 'house' one must understand 'condition', and for 'threshold' one must read a (possibly irreversible) 'point of change'.

When one reads that the Hindu *tirtha* refers to a shallow crossing place, such as a river (in English, a 'ford') but that the term can be used metaphorically and applied to a mountain, city or any other sacred place,[3] it becomes apparent that the crossing in question may lead from this mundane world into a sacred counterpart, and that the places are made sacred in terms of the symbolism of the axial connection, strongest on the mountain top, beside the sacred river, or at the centre of a four-square city.

Such elaborated markers of 'crossing places' occur too frequently in the texts of Homer and Hesiod to be viewed as mere incidental detail. Looking at the wider distribution of this motif, it can be seen that in ancient art and scripture the door is commonly used as a metaphor indicating access to a higher reality connected largely with the Sun. As noted earlier, solar disks with wings, or solar falcons, decorated the lintels of Egyptian and Near Eastern temple doorways, especially those that framed the east-west axis of the temple and 'conducted' the Sun's rays from the ceremonial entrance to the final chamber, a Holy of Holies. The sacred portal in Judaic tradition[4] functions similarly in metaphor as *pars pro toto,* since from the doorway itself the ultimate reference is to the palace it represents and the royal or priestly figure it shelters. Implicit too in the structure and decoration is the potential for epiphany, which may be

mimetic in that a (mere) human plays the part of the god, but the power of spectacle ensures that the ritual act will be interpreted as a theophany. Implicit too in the elaborate rendering of the door frame is the memory of trees and columns worshipped in other times or contexts. Not far away either is the memory of paired or split mountains which frame the 'sky-space' opening into the heavens.

Stepping Through the Door

In figure VI-9, the Akkadian Sungod[5] is seen to rise over the eastern mountain while flanking attendants open two leaves of the doorway of morning. This illustration bears comparison with the Egyptian imagery of the Sun flanked by lions or mountains shown as figures V-8 a-c, in which all three set forth an extended solar metaphor drawing upon the common human perception of 'Sun' as 'Life'. The symbolic doorway or window stands for those significant places of solar appearance which are also the places where the fugitive soul may chance to escape the profane world and the constricting circle of time and space. What lies beyond is the glorious palace of the divinity, bathed in light, and the doors are now revealed as in no way mundane, for they represent but a small outer part of the cosmic dwelling of the god.

Figure VI-9

The theory is supported by archaeological evidence. In many 'ceremonies of appearance' attributed to cult buildings in the eastern Mediterranean, the west-facing window is thought to have served as a domestic setting for an impressive epiphany of priest or king, who, acting in the manner of the Sungod and most likely framed by the bright flames of the rising eastern sun, presented himself to the people in the guise of a

solar god.[6] Elaborations of this theme which portray the celestial gate in the forms of confronted or antithetical mountains, lions, goats, or trees demonstrate the flexibility of ancient iconography in its complex range of referents, all of which are capable of overlapping interaction. One of the most striking image of power to have survived from the early phase of Greek civilisation stands atop the entrance gate to the citadel of Mycenae, where two lions (again) confront the intending visitor, flanking a sturdy pillar which can be no other than the connecting *axis*, the whole artefact amounting to an emblem of secular and spiritual legitimacy and a grave warning to the ill-intentioned. That the whole doorway further frames a view of a distant mountain merely extends the message of 'closeness to the gods'.

The same idea of 'passage through, and beyond' is conveyed by non-standard doorways such as the smoke hole of the tent, the eye of the architectural dome,[7] or the crown of the human head (for practitioners of Yoga). The hecatombs offered to the gods on hearths or altars (which are symbolic *omphaloi*) by the noblest characters in Greek epic, are a prime example of this upward movement which is both an offering of the individual and his social group, at the same time as it is an unconditional gift of worship and prayer. In all these cases the motion is from the profane towards the sacred, from a confined space below towards the openness of the sky-plane. Each constitutes an insubstantial form of the *axis,* but an *axis* nonetheless.

In Biblical tradition God himself is inclined to open gates or doors in the course of self-revelation. In Jacob's dream vision at Bethel, the sleeper hears the voice of God at the "gate of Heaven" high on the (axial) ladder stretching up to the skies, and sees angels travelling both *up and down*. The Psalmist, too, records the fall of manna from the doors of Heaven which opened at the Lord's command.[8] In both episodes there are hints that the *axis* sustains movement in both directions whilst the godhead sits above exercising his authority in the manner of a gatekeeper.

Here we come to the role most relevant to many of Homer's leading characters in the *Odyssey*. We shall mention the suitors, and Iros and Skylla, as 'dis-respecters' of the doorway,[9] and the greater dignity of Telemachos and Athene in the matter of correct doorway etiquette. Circe and Kalypso, it will be shown, have very significant roles as keepers of decidedly cosmic portals into the Otherworld. But the hero himself is the one who engages most actively with all that the doorway represents in the way of power or enablement. His legendary cunning comes into play on those occasions when his companions rush thoughtlessly into the harbour of the Laistrygones or the smoky halls of Circe the enchantress. He takes

his time, he surveys from afar on a rocky headland or he sends an emissary ahead, and armed with the privileged advice of Circe he slips narrowly (but safely) past the twin terrors of the 'narrow gate' between Skylla and Charybdis. Nevertheless even Odysseus may be caught out by greater forces. That his imprisonment inside the cave of Polyphemos operates on a cosmic scale is established by the size of the boulder that closes that particular doorway: a "huge door stop, / a massive thing" (9, 240f.) whose weight would have defeated twenty-two of the best wagons: "a piece of sky-towering cliff" (243), as the poet stresses. The hero triumphs over such boundaries as these by sheer force of intelligence, using the final stratagem of concealment under the belly of the ram (444f.) the one who normally leads the flock, but who now follows at the rear.

The Power of Stone

It is in his very own hall that Odysseus has greatest need of the power of the doorway. It is chosen as the site of the crucial stringing of the bow which will finally reveal the inner strength of the beggar so much despised by the suitors, but first Telemachos (a true son of his father) takes up the threshold position (21, 118-128) and very nearly succeeds in his attempt. It cannot be a coincidence that the bow is left in contact with the door leaves, first by Telemachos (137f.) then by Leodes (164f.) in recurring formulaic lines. After the failure of the suitors to accomplish the feat, Odysseus (still in disguise) finally strings the bow and sends an arrow flying through the twelve axes. The moment has arrived for the master of the house to strip off his rags and begin his deadly assault on the enemies from a position "atop the great threshold" (22, 1-3). When at last his supply of arrows is exhausted and many erstwhile suitors lie dead at his feet, he finally rests the great bow against "a pillar sustaining / the strong built palace" (120f.) which, we noted earlier, is also such a place where the blind singer Demodokos was accustomed to hang his lyre in the Phaiakian palace, and perhaps also, in the case of the sustaining Ithakan pillar, the pillar identified with the appearances of Penelope and the same pillar holding the rack for spears. In all three instances, there is a sense that the pillar, like the doorway, is a place of numinous power capable of 'recharging' an instrument in its capacity as a conduit to supernal forces, whether it is man, woman, bow or spear in need of energising. In all probability it is the worked stone of the pillars (or door jambs and thresholds) which is considered to possess a quality related to its origin (mountain, etc.) or to its durability, seen as a token of the eternal. Miniatures on several Minoan rings have depicted a curious custom of 'stone-embracing' by female

persons hugging what may have been sacred stones (baetyls), a custom which cannot easily be explained; from the close contact involved, however, it would seem some form of 'exchange' is envisaged.

The skill of the singer, like the strength and intelligence of Odysseus and the gentility of Penelope, and the voice of the singer's instrument, would be related to their affinity with the *axis* which provides strength and virtue beyond mortal measure.

All the Gates

In accordance with the techniques of anticipation and recall of which Homer is master, these domestic openings are but shadowy references to the greatest gates of all. 'Doubling', 'mirroring' and 'symbolic overlap' are all considerations to bear in mind when considering the role played by doorways of all kinds in the *Odyssey*, of which there are a great many, often associated with the person of Odysseus himself. The poet has created a 'thematic bundle' intended to draw the material and domestic doorway into a significant (but largely unstated) relationship with an esoteric equivalent, and this, given the use of gate imagery in such episodes as the departure of Hera from Olympos in her mighty chariot through the self-moving "gates of the sky" and across the space between Heaven and Earth (*Iliad* 5, 748-751) must be understood as a *cosmic portal.* Since moreover the function of the Hours guarding Olympos' gates was "to open up the dense darkness or again to close it" (751) it is apparent that, like the gates on the way to the Homeric Underworld, these were in some measure solar gates, or at the very least, portals separating the light of a world beyond from the mundane light of the world below. The passage of Hera through the gates in the darkness further demonstrates that this gateway can allow ingress and egress (or 'two-way traffic') to certain privileged beings.

With this identification of a cosmic portal our investigation acquires an important new direction, one that determines the course of the adventures and reinforces the cosmological subtext of the *Odyssey*. But first, let us see just how the *dramatis personae* of the epic comport themselves in respect of this extremely relevant feature. The Ithakan suitors of course cannot be expected to do the right thing, having no respect for Zeus' code of *xenia,* which for most god-fearing men imposes strict parameters for the granting and receiving of hospitality. When in the very first book of the *Odyssey* Athene arrives at the doors of Odysseus with her commission from Zeus, she finds the suitors idling on the threshold, amusing themselves with frivolous games (1, 96-109) and is left waiting for entry. How very different from the reception she receives from the immature but well-

brought up young Telemachos, who hastens to welcome an unknown guest according to the time-honoured conventions; he is scandalised that she was left to wait. It would seem that the suitors are little better than the monstrous Skylla, who ate her victims *"right in her doorway"* (12, 256, emphasis added).

Athene longs to see her favourite Odysseus at his own doorway, helmeted and bearing two spears, as of old (1, 255ff.) and Homer's audience might perhaps have thought the hero should be enjoying the same exercise of proud authority exhibited by Nestor, who sat at the doors of his house on polished white stones that glistened, perhaps with oil (3, 406ff.). But we know how deeply the household is compromised by the presence of the suitors when we witness the behavior of Melanthios, who should have been the first to recognise and welcome his returning master. Odysseus is disguised as a beggar, but even one such as he should have been treated with respect, and not with the insults and blows which are his lot (17, 212-234). Equally dreadful is the brutish behaviour of Iros who occupies the doorway of the *oikos* and must be punished and demoted by the returning hero. In setting up the vanquished doorman with the trappings of kingship, staff in hand (18, 100-107) at the *lesser* portico doors, a wider ironic sense indirectly conveys that Iros has far exceeded his authority and that the doorway is intrinsically a place where true authority lies. And Iros obviously has no right to it.

The Transformative Cave

Fundamentally, the door shuts *in* or shuts *out*, acting like a key, and it is in such a manner that alchemists have traditionally employed the door symbol. The imagery of the locked door is also employed in Parmenides' description of his gatekeeper, Justice, who "holds the alternate bolts" of the gates which lead to the "paths of Night and Day"; in other words, two solar paths.[10]

Another object capable of translating the same theme is the cave (or the dome of a building which is a built version of the cave). The cave as symbol carries many meanings associated via the cave-womb with life and death; but at its most fundamental it is a 'house' to be entered or left. In this respect it absorbs and elaborates the function of the door of the domestic house or its cosmic equivalent. A dark cave or cavern is familiar to readers of Plato's *Republic* as a place of suffering where humans are confined in their ignorant lifetime; it implies this mortal world, or the individual's present consciousness. In this Platonic instance, it is the beam of light (filtering below from a fire burning higher up, a reverse-image of

the fire normally lit at floor level in the house, i.e. 'inverted fire') which interprets the axial line of escape from the cave and towards the light through the long entranceway.[11] 'Escape into the light' requires the soul to follow the beam upwards through the entrance to another, *real* world (of 'Ideas') which will provide an antidote to the soul's ignorance. For Plato, as in the rituals of initiation, the enclosing cave is implicitly (if unstated) an image of the womb, and escape from the womb is equivalent to rebirth into an altered life characterised by knowledge.

Keepers of the Gate

Invariably the gate or way is kept by guardians or guides. Whilst these would be priests or mentors in the practice of initiatory ritual, in the mystic sense such a person, as 'a being in transition' could very well be the candidate himself, the soul of one who must bring about his own salvation by his own efforts. He will be or will become another Dionysos, another Osiris, and he will either create his own chains or he will free himself by the effort of Self Will.[12] Once such a concept of moral responsibility had found a footing in Greek thinking, metaphysics and individual morality would have begun to walk hand in hand. No sign of such thinking is apparent however in the robust Homeric world of warriors, kings and soothsayers, but it is to be found in far older traditions emerging from the Indian subcontinent and also in some early Greek mysticism drawing on Orphic or Eleusian sources.

The 'Oracle of Trophonius' described by Pausanias from personal experience[13] illustrates an initiatory process of descent (*katabasis*) involving ritualised entry into a womb-cave 'of transformation'. Anyone coming to Delphi and wishing to find an answer to a personal problem, of drought in the land or such like, could be sent to a nearby oracular cave where the once-sinful Trophonius was said to have been enclosed in a dark and terrifying place. One of the initial rituals involved drinking at the wells of Forgetfulness ('to empty his mind') and Memory ('to retain the approaching experience').

(The wells, and the waters, occur in Orphic contexts, and the concepts of Memory and Forgetting are also strongly thematic in the structural development of the *Apologoi*).

As Pausanias tells it, the applicant had to pass through a tight entrance (a 'doorway') then, pushing feet first and falling steeply downwards along an (axial) chasm, he would land in a dark grotto. After as much as a day and a night of isolation, he was able to emerge once more, but again *feet first*, probably propelled by some invisible machinery and thus imitating

the state of one who in death is carried out of the house. The dark underground chamber, with its dark 'chimney' of entrance and exit, served a purpose similar to the sunlit cave with its beam of light described by Plato, which interprets the state of enlightenment in the broadest sense. Since *un*believers were said never to emerge from the cave of Trophonius, a trial of character appears to have been part of the intention. The deathly state implied in the reversal of the body interprets the necessity to be reborn into a new condition, but death, it appears, is fundamental to spiritual life.

These remarks are offered in anticipation of Odysseus' descent to the 'doorway' of Hades, and his 'return', as well as his arrival on the Bay of Phorkys where the Cave of the Nymphs awaits him; as both a terminus and a junction point for the north-south journeys of men or gods, the latter is also destined to become a 'treasure house' for storage of the Phaiakian gifts to the returning master. Every *omphalos* such as this cave, and every other, such as the storeroom opened on Ithaka by Penelope's sturdy hand, is traditionally a source of treasure. But the wealth in question is not necessarily material.

A 'Doorway between Worlds' at Delphi

Still with Delphi, we note that the tomb of Pytho was marked by the *omphalos* stone which stood over the chasm into which, some say, the waters of Deukalion's Flood had poured. It was on the heights of Mt. Parnassos that two ancestors of the Greeks, Deukalion and his wife, came to rest in the fragile ark that had saved their lives when all others perished, and where they eventually scattered the 'stones' that were to become the 'bones' of a new race of men.[14] The myth is a complex one, but several significant factors stand out: the association of a great deluge with the death of a race of men, with the end of an Age (occurring at the omphalic 'centre of the world') and with the birth of a new cosmic phase. A further seemingly minor detail has been signalled by De Santillana and von Dechend,[15] to the effect that Zeus was so enraged by the serving to him (on Mt. Lykaion) of meat from his own slaughtered son that he upturned the table on which the sacrilegious food was presented, thus causing the flood later named for Deukalion. For the two authors this can be no other than the square table, that cosmic 'Frame of Time' which corresponds to the ideal plane of the Earth through the ecliptic. The Deukalion myth would, by this analysis, prove to be a Myth of Precession.

A shrine was built there at Delphi over a chasm, *stomion*, thus forming a gate into a lower world which most probably involves a cleft in the

ground. 'World Centres' such as Delphi was claimed to be are regularly characterised by mountains, chasms and flood waters which prove their identity with the World Axis, for the mountain as the heaven-reaching *axis* transfers its power downwards through the *omphalos* then into the chasm and underworld; the same energy will return from below to the heights if the two-way system holds. Apollo speaks from the skies and the oracle utters a sacred breath from the depth of the Earth. It is by virtue of this double axial connection that down-flowing 'Truth' or the word of the gods can be accessed from below, or on the earthly plane, which is the middle world, and most particularly at the central point of the middle world, as Delphi claimed to be. And if the 'truth' should happen to be expressed by the oracle in ambiguous wordplay on several levels of possible meaning, then that is no more than should be expected from divine revelation, which demands that the recipient make a personal, heart-searching commitment to its interpretation. Therein lies the act of Self Will and an ultimate test of spiritual maturity.

But whereas humans can benefit from those waters of life the *axis* provides at the omphalic 'doorway between worlds', at the end of a World Age, when the Precession of the Equinoxes tilts the world out of kilter, those same beneficent waters can and will become a periodically destructive flood. The 'millstone' breaks, the 'peg' or 'nail' is pulled out, the waters rush in. This mythic association between Precession and flood appears time and again in world literature, even in lands where the people have seen neither sea, nor lakes, nor great rivers.[16] So the doorway has both a benevolent aspect and a potentially destructive one.

There is, it seems, a great art in passing safely through the cosmic portal.

Doorways in Related Epic: *Gilgamesh*, *Rg Veda*, Hesiod

The majority of the episodes in the *Apologoi* include gates, doors and openings in varying forms along with fearsome guardians who do not make it easy for the traveller to complete the stages of his journey. All that is required to create a 'door' is an aperture or two upright markers enclosing a space. These markers may be as great as mountains, as they appeared in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, where the scorpion guardians allowed the hero to pass through and into the land of Utnapishtim, the guardian of the secret of eternal life. The tops of these mountains are named the props of Heaven which are rooted in the Netherworld.[17] Therefore they are World Pillars, allomorphs of the *axis mundi*. They are also solar gates, for Gilgamesh is following the "hidden road where rises the Sun",[18] and the

twin mountains *guard* the Sun at its rising.[19] But he is permitted to pass 'through' and 'along', so the twin peaks are serving as doorway or doorways.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* long predates the *Odyssey*. Its enormous popularity in the Near East is evidenced in the number of fragments so far recovered and preserved. Furthermore, many documented parallels and correspondences between *Gilgamesh* and the *Odyssey* suggest significant cross fertilisation,[20] which in turn implies (but of course does not prove) a shared source or a common function, perhaps initiatory in purpose. Both epics include developed episodes where heroic individuals pass through solar doors (or Sungates) into an Otherworld. It is the 'Open Sesame' motif which is to be found in the literature and folklore of many traditional societies in the Old World and the New, where it figures variously as a paired icebergs, clashing rocks ('Symplegades'), sharp-toothed jaws or reeds, or rolling mountains,[21] for entry can never be made easy. By thinking of the two upright elements as paired *axes mundi*, and the space between them as an *omphalos* (or access to one) it will become clear that the symbolism of the doorway may (and often does) point to a microcosmic mirror of a macrocosmic phenomenon. Man being mortal must play out his destiny on the solid Earth, but it is ever the sky which provides the paradigm for personal betterment.

The clashing rocks which appear in the *Odyssey* have a close partner in the ancient *Rg Veda*, where it is Day and Night which 'clash together' at the moment when it is neither one nor the other, but Sunrise or Sunset.[22] (Indic figurative language, like the Egyptian, has no problem in merging an abstract such as 'Time' with the concrete: in this case, 'rocks' or 'door leaves'). At these hours of the day it impossible to determine whether day or night is in the ascendant, hence the 'clashing' battle between the two which endures until one overcomes the other to assert the passage of time into day or night. Nevertheless, that is the moment when sacrifice must be made because it presents a 'door of opportunity' for the sacrificer's passage or escape from this world, into the land beyond the Sun and into the kingdom of the gods.[23] In other Indic sources it is proposed that the soul aspiring to immortality must also pass even further, beyond the dazzling rays of the Sun and into "the land of darkness beyond the Sun",[24] and here perhaps the reader will remember Odysseus' directional problems on the isle of Circe, as well as Hera's doorway into the darkness.

It would take us too far from our purpose here to compare in detail the gates of Homer's *imago mundi* with that of Hesiod, though similarities do exist between the two, and certain features also occur in other neighbouring cultures. So the comparison will be brief. The three planes of

the Earth, for example (Heaven, land / sea and Underworld, named at *Iliad* 15, 189-193) and shared between Zeus ("wide sky"), Poseidon ("grey sea") and Hades ("mists and darkness") are commonplace, and still to our mind a logical division of perceived space. Each plane has its gateway. More confusing is the sense in which "Earth and high Olympos are common to all three", as stated in line 193 of the same book. Presumably all three gods have a place in or on Olympos if they choose to use it, and (middle) Earth, lying adjacent to both upper- and under-world, unites the three. But it is equally possible that the mountain of Olympos makes a physical connection between the three planes, having as it does (and like the *axis* and the cosmic Tree of Life, Yggdrasil, and the twin mountains of Mashu in *Gilgamesh*) its roots in the Netherworld, and its head in the sky. In this case, Olympos would be acting as a binding linear force which pierces the individual planes and keeps them in communication. Where the mountain axis passes through the Earth-plane, or touches the Heaven or Hadean plane, an opening into the world of the gods is created by the *omphalos,* which is a door giving access to worlds above and below and offering passage *both down and up.* But the opening must be blocked by some means to prevent the up-flowing of water from the abyss. This must be the true purpose of the blocking foundation stone, the central cosmic mountain, and even perhaps the *omphalos* stone of Delphi. They function both as primary locks or blocking obstacles (like Polyphemos' boulder) and markers to the Centre of the World.

Architectural Evidence at Delphi

This cosmic mountain-as-stabiliser is perhaps unfamiliar to readers of Homer, who may quite reasonably feel sceptical about such an interpretation. Reassurance may be found in the traditions related to the great oracular site of Delphi of which we spoke earlier in this chapter. It is a remote place, far from easy of access. So one has to wonder why Delphi was chosen and given such a grandiose mythology. It has already been noted that high places are 'nearer to the gods', and that mountain sanctuaries had long been utilised in Bronze Age Crete, perhaps for that very reason, but Delphi has a particular aspect which qualifies it as a sacred landscape: being a 'split' mountain, it has two peaks, and the precinct was founded below in the hollow between them. These peaks and the intervening valley can be interpreted as a road or gateway into the beyond.

The Castalian spring provides water for practical and ritual needs at Delphi, but in axial ideology, water must always be anticipated in close

symbolic proximity to the foot of the *axis* or World Pillar. It is the life-giving source, water being the first essential of all existence, and an agent necessary to the fertility of crops and livestock. Lower still at Delphi lies the *tholos* Temple of Apollo which provides the gateway to Delphi itself. It appears from archaeological evidence that the temple was built to accommodate the gassy chasm at its centre, for in the asymmetrical subterranean *adyton* where the priestesses are thought to have sat, archaeologists have found evidence of underground passages and an outlet drain for springs. Thus the temple must have been built secondarily, upwards from this central natural feature, implying the great importance or even *primacy* of the oracular fissure and the central place and its symbolic waters.

One of the best known legends concerning the establishment of Delphi as a cult centre concerns its centrality. The famous white '*omphalos*' stone is reputed to have acted as the marker of Delphi in its role as the centre of the world, and we can add to this the legend that Zeus chose the site of the future sacred precinct by releasing birds from east and west before observing the point of their coming together. It was perhaps essential that the centre be 'fixed' in directional terms (on the Earth plane) as well as ideological ones. Also, Apollo was rumoured to have fixed his temple with alignments to midsummer Sunrise and midwinter Sunset, the solstice times. As previously noted, the marker stone is thought to have stood at the centre of the oracular site where the priestesses consulted the gods, close to the Earth fissure said to have given off trance-inspiring gases. True or not, this would make sense in terms of archaic thinking, according to which the break in the Earth's surface would open a 'way between worlds'. By sitting close to the fissure and central marker the officiants would passively confirm their ability to communicate with the gods along the axial life-line. The stone was at the same time a marker of the ideological Centre and, effectively, a safety barrier against the destructive power of the Underworld which could send up a deluge of flood waters, if natural order were ever to be disrupted.

World Architecture

Even a brief examination of the symbolic gateways of world architecture (west doors of mediaeval cathedrals in Europe, Hindu *torana* and Japanese *torii,* for example) will reveal the cultural importance of such tokens of transition. On such gateway thresholds, man stands poised between this profane world and the sacred, between darkness and light, the known and unknown. The same principle is carried through into the design

of interiors. In order to establish directional centrality, sacred and secular buildings would often enclose their holiest space within walls tightly orientated to the cardinal directions. Thus the Christian enters his church from the west door with its eschatological visions of Christ ("the door", the "way") placed in glory above the Last Judgment, then, passing the font where he was baptised into 'new life', he progresses towards the eastern altar, the place of the holy presence and access to other sacraments. On his way along the nave he will transit the crossing place where east-west and north-south transepts meet; above him a tower or steeple may reach to the sky, or a dome will let the light of the heavens flood down, illuminating this architectural and symbolic centre. (A place sometimes adorned by a labyrinth, a horizontal form of the path to a divine Centre). There are instances too, of ancient four-sided, cardinally-aligned Hindu cities divided internally into four quarters, each allocated to a particular caste. If this design is read in a clockwise direction it emerges that not only were the castes placed in order of spiritual (not temporal) importance, beginning with the northern placement of the priests, but the higher-to-lower sequence reflected the movement of the seasons from the winter solstice (north) to the spring equinox (east), summer solstice (south) and autumn equinox (west, land of darkness). By means of such repetitions of the solar pattern projected upon the Earth, societies have regularly affirmed their need of stability, permanence, and above all, *rightness in terms of the greater cosmic order* (which is a necessary adjunct to any declaration of power).[25]

The Etruscan people passed on a similar policy to their Roman successors in the form of the four-square city[26] incorporating the north-south central axis (*cardo*) and the east-west horizontal bisection (*decumanus*), leaving the four gates of the city aligned with the cardinal directions. The concept was further elaborated by creation of the *mundus*, a central hollow place associated with offerings of first fruits, or perhaps seed grain; in either case, the purpose probably involved fertility. It was a dark and secret place, reputedly dangerous to enter; only the initiated could approach it on the three *dies religiosi*. It was covered by a heavy stone said to be "the door of Orcus grim".[27] Such a hollow, feminine / receptive space associated with Ceres or other goddesses of fertility, taken in the context of its infernal associations, reveals the *mundus* (equivalent of Greek *kosmos*) to be a model of the *omphalos* which opens between middle and lower plane.

And whilst we speak of Roman culture we might usefully remember the Roman god of gateways, Janus, most generally known as the god of the turning of the year (January) and the double-headed symbol of

'yesterday and tomorrow', past and future. But his role is a great deal more complex. His attributes include sceptre and crown, and a pair of keys, denoting secular and spiritual power respectively. The keys are those which open the heavenly gates leading out of this world, which are the gates at the furthest ends of the Sun's cycle, that is, the summer and winter solstices; these correspond to the doors of Heaven at the Sun's highest elevation (*janua coeli*) and of Hell (*janua inferni*) when the Sun stands at the lowest point of its annual journey. Moreover, the etymology of Janus which has its root in *ire*, to go, ties it to *in-ire*, entry into 'initiation'; linguistically Janus thereby reflects Sanskrit *yana,* 'way', which forms another semantic link between entry and spiritual passage through the gateway. In the same manner, Christ proclaimed his identity with the door into knowledge ("knock, and it shall be opened unto you").[28]

Janus is revealed as a paradigm of knowledge and power conditional upon the flow of solar time, while the 'solstitial' keys he holds in his right and left hands constitute 'Two Ways' by which the soul may precede, for better or worse, into death or eternity. One points the path 'down', the other 'up'. These are simplistic terms but they clarify the three dimensions underlying the concept. Concerning Time (our fourth dimension) the Janus figure draws the door, the way, and the goal into a single unit, as an expression of the eternal. Indeed, Janus is primarily an image of immutable and unchanging nature, that First Principle and Aristotle's 'Prime Mover' who must of necessity rest immobile, for even the smallest movement involves sequential change across space and time. With his two contrary heads, the Roman god portrays not oppositional conflict but a fusion of past and present, with the everlasting 'now' of an unseen, hidden face looking away from the viewer into an invisible dimension. Like the Hindu god Shiva whose invisible 'third eye' represents eternity, the two visible faces of Janus invite contemplation of the crossing of the threshold of time and space into a condition which is timeless and non-spatial.

The epic in which Odysseus wanders through 'solar doors' leading into the four dimensions defining space, we shall see, is securely rooted in a widely practised ancient tradition.

Plato and the Soul Journey

Plato will be allowed to conclude this chapter in recognition of his particular understanding of the Homeric journey of transformation. He incorporated the travels of Odysseus into certain of his cosmological dialogues in which Socrates was allowed to become a 'new Odysseus', his experiences reflecting the wanderings of the earlier hero into 'descent'

(Hades) and 'ascent', if only in speech, to a transcendent vision,[29] until the journey of Socrates ends with the realisation that the heavenly city is to be found only in one's own self, in one's own soul.[30] Once read or heard and absorbed, the text provides the template for any other 'soul journey'.[31]

The ground is now prepared for an approach to the hero journey of Odysseus in which he follows the route of the Sun and encounters the many solar portals which could, if he so chose, deliver him from the unending cycle of existence. Nevertheless there is another important matter to address before the journey carries us any further along circular highways and their various gates into the Otherworld. At some stage the hero of the Apologoi will return to his point of departure (the cavern of Kalypso) and a preliminary stage of the journey will be complete. But there is still the transit from Ogygia to Scheria, and Scheria to Ithaka to fulfil, and this will require a straight trajectory linking "the navel of the sea" to the highest point of the sky. It is essential to find a 'Road to Heaven'.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ROADS TO HEAVEN

There can scarcely have been any society that did not aspire to return to its point of origin, whether to speak with their ancestors, consult the gods and seek their aid or find a blissful life in the Otherworld. Ideally, all men should know the path's beginnings, its course and its destination.

Popular imagination is unlikely to have created an abstract path *ex nihilo*; it is far more credible that some visible phenomena would have suggested themselves as indicators of direction, ready-made as it were by a beneficent being in order that man may find his way to the merited destination. Two at least offer themselves as candidates for a celestial highway and a third can be adduced from remarkable events which occur at the top and tail of its course. An understanding of the three natural features will also help to clarify some of the enduring directional puzzles for which the *Apologoi* are notorious.

If Odysseus is to leave the great circle of the Sun, where might he go? His being a soul journey or journey of initiation, some other distant astral phenomenon most closely associated with the fate of souls must be sought out. In view of the fact that in this analysis the circle of the ecliptic will have been completed on arrival at the cave of Kalypso, one must look for an exceptional feature, one which might claim to be as mighty as the Sun. The Sun is by any definition a singularity, as is our one and only Moon, and 'singular' too in all senses must be the centre of the galaxy itself. Only one Sun and one Moon are visible in the universe as it presents to the naked eye, and each should be considered as a candidate for a specific soteriological function. As for the true centre of the universe, it may or may not be marked by a visible solar body at any one time, but it may be open to deduction, as, for example, in the case of the centre point of the ecliptic circle. As far as the parallel identities of Circe and Kalypso are concerned and particularly in respect of their flying shuttle passing from side to side across the loom, the Milky Way would seem an attractive candidate as a 'cosmic path' or *axis mundi* linking their cosmic dwellings.

It is not the only candidate for a celestial pathway but is the most strikingly visible. The Way has attracted myths and legends in every ancient civilisation and equally often adapted them to the Afterlife of man.

But before embarking on the universal mythology of the several 'roads to heaven' the ancient imagery may be put into context by understanding how modern astronomy defines the middle of the sky by the use of an imaginary line projected between Earth and the heavens.

The Meridian

Every branch of knowledge requires a base line or fundamental term of reference capable of anchoring any speculative development in the surer ground of the tried and tested. For celestial geography, the meridian or theoretical 'middle' line does just that, by dividing the visible hemisphere into two equal parts. It does so by proposing a great circle from the north point on the observer's horizon to the corresponding south, by way of an arc touching the zenith and the celestial poles. Using the meridian, the skywatcher can plot and record the meridian transit or other such changes in the position of celestial bodies at any particular moment. This is a modern, abstract tool of practical science, but there is no reason to believe that ancient civilisations did not possess similar tools for the standardisation of measurement; in fact, although posts, *gnomons*, string and shadows are sufficient for the establishment of direction, mountain, tree, pillar and horizon offer supplementary proof of change and motion. Although we lack positive evidence of the way such instruments were used in prehistoric times, the mythological record has left a wealth of evidence related to natural phenomena, if only it can be unravelled and systematised. There are at least three candidates for a natural highway across the skies of a kind which ties together the great circular paths of ecliptic and Zodiac and links the upper world to the Earth's horizon. They will be reviewed one by one.

The Milky Way

This starry band features in the mythology of all known societies, where it is known as a path, a road or a river frequented by souls or birds. Soul and bird are often mythically accommodated by analogy with annual avian migrations from the northern hemisphere in winter, which largely involves movement to the south ('death') and spring-time returns to the north ('life, rebirth') which, as we shall see, are applied equally to human soul-regeneration. Many peoples imagine the souls of their ancestors as stellar forms on whose behalf shamans would conduct ecstatic journeys to the land of the spirits in search of advice or clarification. Their path would take them along the brightest of stellar highways, often acting the part of a

bird in the ritual. Shamanism may well lie at the heart of those universal beliefs in a starry 'road of the spirits' prevailing throughout the traditional cultures.

The phenomenon we know as the Milky Way is but one outer spiral of the great sky cluster of our galaxy. This spiral contains our solar system and from Earth is seen edge-on, so it is possible for the naked eye of the skywatcher to detect a dark bulge at the centre and a dark rift extending to either side (figure VII-10)**.** It is now known that these are not empty spaces, but dark holes crammed with billions of stars. With splendid irony - or is it some atavistic memory? modern science fiction often describes such black spaces as 'Stargates', which is exactly the role found for them in the ancient tradition of the soul journey.

The white band seen against the night sky rises daily at dawn in the east, where it is scarcely visible, but as the day progresses into night, it swings in an arc across the sky from north to south, and this is the position in which it will be most clearly seen against the darkness of the firmament. (The trajectory continues across the other side of the globe, out of sight). There are accordingly not one but *two* rising, arching bands to be seen at separate times from a single location, the east-west and the north-south, although the precise angle and visibility will depend upon the season and the standpoint of the viewer. In the higher northern latitudes the Way is seen on an autumn night climbing from the east and north-east to the zenith and curving down again to disappear over the south-western horizon. Nevertheless, the observation that not one but two Milky Ways may be following opposing paths (N-S and E-W) fosters, in mythic thinking, the possibility that two Ways meet and cross at some point, at a verifiable time and place. There is also the important factor of an analogy between a day-path (Sun's ecliptic) and a night-path (Milky Way).

A certain interesting complication arises from the fact that once upon a very distant time the North Pole Star lay in the Milky Way in the Great Rift, at the point where the two 'rivers' or 'arms' parted (figure VII-10). From approximately 15,500 to 13,000 BCE the northern celestial pole was close to the star Deneb in Cygnus, the star group which spans the two arms of the way and its dark dividing rift, close to the galactic Centre (GC) but it subsequently moved away as a result of Precession. This fact may point to scarcely credible advanced knowledge at an early date, but the archaeoastronomer Michael Rappenglück has been able to offer proof of such knowledge in pictorial evidence found in the Lascaux Cave in France. It appears that Palaeolithic shamanistic cultures were already by this time focused on the celestial pole when it resided *in the Milky Way*, as a place of transformation to which man could travel in spirit.[1] If this is

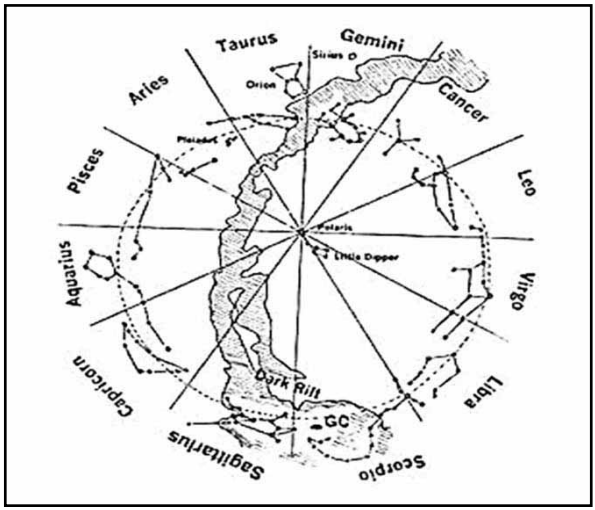

Figure VII-10

correct, then the archaic myths under discussion belong to a time scale beyond present imagining.

In Mayan thinking, the east-west Way is reified as a canoe, and the north-south as the crocodile tree, giving them distinct and separate identities which nevertheless imply east-west movement on the horizontal plane of water (the canoe) and north-south stability (the tree, the fixed *axis*). Furthermore, these ancient peoples idealised the centre point of the theoretical 'crossing' of the two Milky Ways at its point of conjunction with the solar ecliptic. The point where the stellar and solar features came into line with each other defined an esoteric third, which was recognised as the Centre of the Universe and source of Creation.[2] In the Andes,[3] the Incas also divided 'seasonal space' into quarters as defined by the two axes of the Way where they meet the horizon at the solstice points. The Sun was always 'in' one or other of the two bands of the Way.[4] These two paths (or ways or rivers) having arisen in the north, a Centre of Origin was imputed to the north (June solstice) as 'up', for, in the south (December solstice) the two bands were thought to collide. Inevitably the law of opposite complementarities determined that the south ('down') should become the way to the world below. The Incan dead were thought to inhabit the point where the Milky Way crossed the tail of Scorpio, equally the place where the collision of the two rivers of the Way created 'great

foaming waters' (in reality the bright stellar clouds of the Galactic Centre).[5] The festivals which acknowledged the December solstice in these lands also served as a festival of the dead, when it was popularly believed that the 'solstice window' was aligned to provide an opening through which the ancestors could return to commune with the living at dawn, when the Sun made its first appearance of the day, and while 'standing still' at its solstice turn. Conversely, when the great god of the Incas, Wiraqocha, grew old and tired and decided to leave the Earth, he departed by the north-west branch of the Way where it coincided with the June solstice. Yet, why should a god grow tired, and leave? Those who place faith in an early (and universal) awareness of Precession will say that he departed because the framework of galactic 'rivers' linking the solstices of the Sun, where 'doors' opened into the Otherworld, either no longer held good or was about to come crashing to an end, and there was consequently no longer to be any means of gaining the land of the gods. Remote as they may seem from the eastern Mediterranean, these South American examples from a civilisation renowned for its accurate observing and record keeping (in both glyph and folk memory) provide a formidable example of mythic thinking. Their concept of a 'true centre of the sky' will prove especially relevant to our final analysis of the Ithakan homeland.

The shifting dwellings of Circe and Kalypso as we intend to show them, which are respectively north and east, Circe, and west and south, Kalypso, may also be visualised as two points at respective termini on the axial link provided by the galactic arm of the Milky Way seen in our northern skies. This deduction is supported by the knowledge that the path of the ecliptic intersects the Way in the area of the solstices, so the Sun and Way regularly meet at the times when the solstice doors are open to travellers along the Way. Whether walking, sailing or flying through the air, such space travellers are bound to find here the openings into an Otherworld beyond the Sun.

In classical mythology the galaxy of the Latin *via lactea* or Greek *galaktos* refers to the whiteness of the close-packed stars of the Way. Legend has it that the infant Heracles was carried to feed at the breast of a sleeping Hera, only to be violently repudiated when the goddess awoke and her milk spilled out across the sky. The babe was nevertheless transformed by his contact with the divine milk which endowed him with exceptional strength.[6] This 'spring of milk' still marks the dark firmament, flowing like a vast tide across the night skies, though it is now less visible since the present light pollution of our cities has reduced its brilliance.

The Egyptians recognised the Way as the celestial equivalent of their own Nile River. As in the metaphors of milk and nourishment provided in

the Greek legend by the lactating 'mother god', the Way *is* the Nile because the great African river nourishes the land and maintains its fertility. In India, the holy Ganges or goddess Ganga is still to this day known as the earthly form of a river which pours from the 'toe of Vishnu' (in the stars of the Milky Way) and subsequently passes through a hole at the North Pole before running down the sides of the mystical Mount Meru, which stands at the Arctic pole. (The 'river of milk' finally comes to Earth in the foothills of the Himalayas).[7] The holiness of the Ganges as a 'River of Heaven' is a direct consequence of its celestial connection to the Milky Way, and even now after so many centuries it is still believed that spiritual wholeness is conferred on those who wash there, or who are cremated on its banks and set adrift upon its waters.

Egyptian Nut

Here, via milk and motherhood, fertility and eternal life, we discover a connection with the sky mother of Egyptian myth, the goddess Nut. Of all recorded sky divinities, only in China and Egypt is the sky conceived as a female being and her consort (the Earth) correspondingly cast as male. In Egyptian imagery the sky goddess who supports the upper world is shown arched across the firmament with her four limbs placed at the four corners of the Earth (i.e. at the four World Pillars at the solstices), her elongated body either bedecked with stars or gleaming with the water which flows along her spine. Every day she swallows the Sun at night and delivers him from the 'womb' of her body at dawn. She will, by analogy, also 'swallow' the Pharaoh at death and 'rebirth' him into the Afterlife from her fertile body.

One of the nested boxes enclosing the sarcophagus of Tutankhamun portrays the goddess and speaks of her as "Nut, the Great, the Brilliant One". Even more striking is the complex image found on the ceiling of the tomb of Seti I, where two back-to-back goddesses display the symbolic journey of two sets of twelve solar disks (one for each of the hours of day in the heavens, and of night in the underworld) through their respective bodies. They are intended to demonstrate that a pattern of renewal established by the path of the Sun applies equally to the motion of the constellations, to all life forms, and even to the cycle of the soul's regeneration.

The Egyptians kept a close watch on the solar phases. In that ancient society the maintenance of 'right social order', known as *Ma'at,* ('harmony', 'balance', 'justice') was essentially an extension of the harmonious order of the greater universe. The sky provided them with an image of an

eternity in motion where the celestial bodies disappeared and 'died' yet always reappeared to 'live again'. In such a manner they presented immortality in the guise of a process of *orderly change*. That very order and its certainties were sought by man for application to his own world, and for that very reason any distinctive variations in sky phenomena would create strong anxieties concerning, for example, the return of the Sun after its nightly absence. Solar return after winter solstice in January (as it occurred in 3,500 BCE) was particularly vital to the community's survival. Rites of renewal were enacted at these and other critical times to ensure that the daily and annual passage of the Sun through the body of Nut, his daughter, was successfully concluded.

In addition, the inclusion of Nut's image on the interior of countless Egyptian coffin lids testifies to a secondary function for Nut as a soul guide or protector of the deceased, man or woman, who lies in the coffin as if enfolded in the protective wings of the goddess. Funerary texts in some Ramesside tombs[8] even describe Nut as the 'embracing mother' of the Pharaoh who facilitates the deceased ruler's transmission from Earth to Heaven.[9] Hers is the agency which brings about the regeneration of the Pharaoh through his assimilation to the path of the Sun. At night she carries the Sun within her body, the latter identified with the starry course of the Milky Way. It follows that the human form of this goddess not only represents the passage of solar and galactic bodies, but in this, her single form, her hands and feet planted firmly at the four solstice points or world corners, she expresses the meeting or merger of the two great paths: the solar ecliptic as it crosses or blends with the path of the Milky Way (figure VII-10). Against the changeless and timeless solidity of the firmament which she supports, Nut establishes the path by which the souls of the privileged (and especially the soul of the Pharaoh, who will oftimes make this journey in order to be able to intervene on behalf of his people) make their way out of the terrestrial field and into the Otherworld. As we shall see, the same solar circuit has shaped the journey of our present hero.

With a certain stretch of the imagination, the long limbs of Nut as the Milky Way can be seen in the sky where they are stretched across the blackness of the night. In 3,500 BCE, an astronomer tells us,[10] her head would lie in the region eventually known as Gemini, and the fork in the two 'legs' of the Way could be read into a space where the Milky Way splits into its separate branches. There, the star Deneb in the constellation Cygnus (figure VIII-13) would mark the area of 'bringing to birth', at the parting of the two rivers ('legs of Nut') of the Milky Way. From the day (April 19$^{th.}$) when the 'head' or 'mouth' of the stellar body of Nut was to slide over the horizon, precisely nine months would have elapsed before

the rising Sun was 'reborn' on January 16th (winter solstice) at which time Nut's 'legs' would have risen before the dawn. Thus, myth and reality are seen to reciprocate and reinforce each other in a manner which seems remarkable to modern thinkers, but doubtless made perfect sense to those of ancient mind who not only brought the myth into existence but created a striking image by which the reality was imprinted on eye, brain and memory. The whole is perfectly logical, even in its circularity of argument.

There is another universally-experienced natural event to consider: one which imitates the starry way, but in the full light of day. It, too, acquires the mythic character of 'a way to the stars'.

The Rainbow Bridge

Greek tradition, just like the Egyptian, has a sky goddess who creates a 'bridge' between Heaven and Earth. Iris acts like Hermes as a messenger of Zeus and Hera,[11] but although there is little evidence in Homer of a role for Iris as a psychopomp, or guide to ascending souls, the rainbow does carry this value in several cultures. The 'path' of Iris is the rainbow which arcs across the sky when the Sun's rays, science tells us, refract at a particular angle through suspended water droplets or ice crystals. The Sun must be relatively low on the horizon for this to occur. Consequently, the rainbow appears relatively early or late in the day when the Sun is either in the east (morning) or the west (afternoon), at an angle of 180° to the Sun. It follows that the bow or arc through the daytime sky created by the eastern or westerly Sun will trace a path lying approximately *north-south*. Once again the north-south axis comes to the fore as a potential spiritual direction, and one moreover that corresponds with the matching *axis* of the Milky Way in its clearest manifestation. Both are prime candidates for World Axis status, since both appear to unite the Heavens with the Earth.

In popular tradition the rainbow even holds out the prospect of a crock of gold hidden at its never-to-be found extremity. (This treasure occupies an *omphalos*-point, very much in the ancient tradition of flowery abundance translating 'wealth' as fertility, at the place where the planes are pierced by the *axis*). Readers who remember their childhood fairy tales will also know that when Jack threw down the magic beans from which his enormous Beanstalk ('Tree of Life') grew beyond normal proportions, *overnight* (hence 'timelessly') he was able to climb it to the magnificent palace of a giant (symbol of 'omphalic magnificence') and capture treasure in the form of the goose who lays the golden eggs ('fertility' equalling 'wealth'). Myth has preserved an ancient ideology in a popular

fairy tale, nowadays considered suitable for children. In the Old Testament, the rainbow makes an appearance as the outward sign of God's covenant of renewal to Noah and his people after the great Flood: a 'bond' in more than one sense of the word (*Genesis* 9, 11-17). The Biblical association of the rainbow with deluge or flood is not coincidental, however. It takes us back to the precessional associations of the 'wobbling' *axis* and the many forms of cataclysm that mark the end of a World Age. This deluge theme will presently require our closer attention.

The rainbow being a worldwide phenomenon, it is no surprise that traditions naming it as a 'world bridge' are likewise universal, nor is it to be wondered at that the curved rainbow may be mystically equated with the arching Milky Way as another 'road of souls'. The rainbow of folklore may even take on an ophidian identity as a snake or serpent,[12] and the esoteric meaning of the serpent is the cosmic current of those forces flowing between Heaven and Earth which constitute the essence of the *axis mundi*.[13] Obviously the purpose of any bridge (or its common variant, the ladder) is to unite two sides and to make transition possible in either direction, but the bridge equally spans sources of danger such as rivers and ravines. In accordance with the law of correspondences, if the negative (the danger) lies below, the positive must stand above; when couched in metaphysical terms, 'Upwards' must identify the supra-cosmic realm of liberation, and 'Below' (into which the soul may 'fall' from the bridge or ladder) is the phenomenal world where man is trapped in a cyclic existence. The substance of such ideas has been incorporated in the ancient Indian game of Snakes and Ladders, a teaching aid originally employing the symbolism of ascent and (less desirable) descent, to illustrate the positive value of ladders (virtues) compared with snakes (which are vices). In a Jain miniature[14] depicting the *Gyanbazi* game, it is apparent that each player must battle his way across the board of 84 squares representing human qualities, towards a heavenly palace at the very top of the page. As a spiritual metaphor the game exhibits the same structural and directional elements as Odysseus' own perilous journey towards a northern celestial palace of his own.

Unfortunately a 'spiritual bridge' of any kind which carries the soul from one condition to another does not provide an easy passage. It is invariably narrow, ephemeral and perilous, as befits a place of trial or judgment. The bridge is the *axis* which leads from death to immortality, but only the hardiest may survive it.[15] In the Homeric canon, it is not a bridge but the 'clashing gates' which most faithfully interpret the hazards of transition, but there is a case for considering the whole of Odysseus' ten year voyage as a journey along the (ecliptic) path as a bridge between

worlds in which the 'islands' serve as portals of entry and exit. The Rainbow, or perhaps more likely, the Milky Way Path is the intermediate way of the final phase which carries the hero's frail craft out of the circle of existence.

Of course any bridge has two directions or 'flow paths' of left-to-right or right-to-left, up to down or down to up. If the voyaging soul is to reach liberation, it must proceed steadfastly in a single direction, leaving behind the material world which it aims to escape. To *turn back* will entail a *falling back* and the necessity of repetition and another perhaps equally doomed attempt to reach the other side. To go on, on the other hand, is the only way to achieve paradise or *nirvana*, or to identity oneself 'Self-lessly' with the One.

This I suggest is the situation in which Odysseus finds himself in the course of his separate visits to Circe and Kalypso. From Circe he sets out to a destination which is necessary but false - so he must return from Hades to the goddess of the north and re-enter the ecliptic path, until he finds a second solar doorway into the southerly cave of Kalypso. She it is who is able to release him from his chained existence and direct him towards paradisal Scheria. Yet Circe is adamant that her lover's path must take him to Hades before he faces the challenges of the Sirens, the jaws of Skylla and the whirlpool of Charybdis. This he undertakes with a heavy heart, but without demur, for he seems destined to fulfil the common initiatory paradigm which requires an ascent to be preceded by a descent to the kingdom of the dead, or trial and judgment before final acceptance. The principle of 'descent before ascent' assuredly rests upon a common perception that the sinking of the daily or seasonal Sun must precede its elevation, or that the setting down of the seed into Mother Earth provides necessary shelter and nourishment to the plant until it is ready to spring up into new life.

A third aspect of the heavens is not only relevant to the Milky Way and the Rainbow as north-south phenomena, but also links celestial north and south to specific points on the ecliptic in its embodiment as the Zodiac. This is the 'lunar dragon' of mythology, or the lunar nodes of a more developed astronomy.

Lunar Nodes of Eclipse

At certain points in the sky, the paths of the Sun and Moon intersect due to the inclination of the Moon's orbital plane to that of the Sun, the ecliptic (figure VII-11**).** These locations have long been known as the lunar nodes. The 'nodes' are not planets, but such was their importance in

ancient Hindu and Islamic cosmology that they were elevated to the status of 'pseudo-planets' and given the astrological names Rahu (north node) and Ketu (south node), by which titles they are still known to Indian astrologers today. Rahu corresponds to the Zodiac house of Gemini, and Ketu stands in Sagittarius.

The nodal points are those where eclipses will occur, either when the Moon is on the node at the same time as the Sun, which (from the

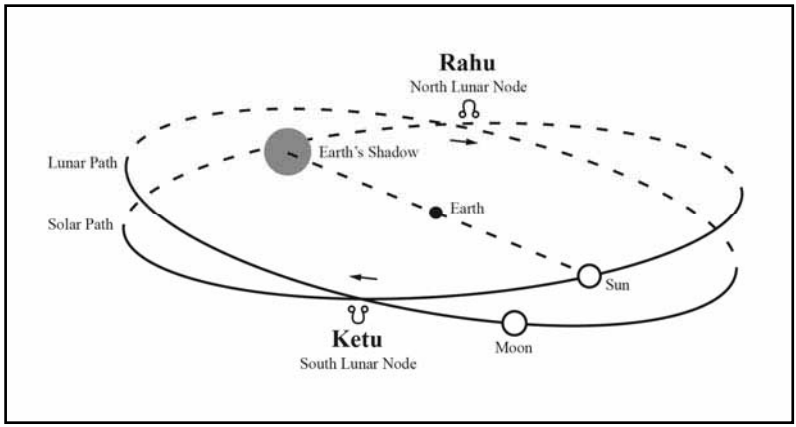

Figure VII-11

viewpoint of Earth) the Moon obscures with its shadow, or the Sun is in the diametrically opposite position, at which time the Moon will be obscured by the Earth's shadow. As we shall see, the entry of the eclipse into this saga of planetary soul-journeying introduces a particularly terrifying event which must to some extent underlie and inform the Homeric narrative.

The Eclipse Dragon

In the manner of an *axis mundi*, the imagined linear connection between the two nodal points takes on mythic power with the conjoined nodes visualised in concrete form as a serpent-dragon, having a (Rahu) head in the northern Zodiac (Gemini / Taurus) and the tip of a coiled, knotted (Ketu) tail in the south (Scorpio / Sagittarius).[16] The dragon 'moves' westwards, i.e. against the movement of the Zodiac circle. In

ancient Chinese astronomy, a solar eclipse is the work of a Sun-eating dragon that must be chased away with the banging of pots and pans.

At this point we need to know the significance for ancient astronomers of the lunar nodes in their respective Zodiac locations. In a late, unfinished and posthumously edited work on the iconography of Sagittarius[17] Coomaraswamy discussed the role of the archer-Centaur figure which human imagination has projected on to this area of the skies. He noted that close to Sagittarius lies the constellation of Scorpius, the scorpion, whose barbed tail is raised in such a way that it points to the same space which is occupying the attention of the archer. Some very early images show archer and scorpion blended into a single *chimaera* (figure VII-12). Reading from the left of the figure, we identify Scorpio in the tail of the 'horse', whose spine also carries the back and head of a fish. The archer with his bow faces a fruiting tree, perhaps a vine, which I believe serves as a symbol of the World Axis. It is of some interest that the tree in question is rooted in a rocky pile, the probable equivalent of the celestial mountain. Here, it will be shown, lies the navel-place so long associated with Kalypso's underworld cavern at the navel of the sea.

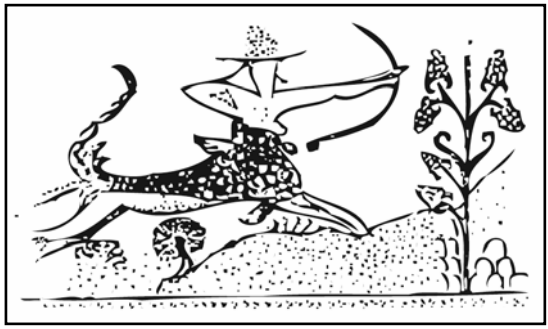

Figure VII-12

Scorpio, blended with Sagittarius, archer-Centaur, defends the fruiting Tree of Life, or World Axis, which is rooted in the clearly visible (abyss-closing?) rocks of the Earth, the *omphalos*-point where Earth's plane is breached.

The crucial questions concern defence and attack: what does the archer defend, and where is he aiming his arrow?[18] To follow the solution, it is essential to know that both scorpion and snake have always signified the inferior world, as does their *alter ego*, the dragon. The scorpion is so closely identified with Sagittarius that the two are commonly fused (as in

the figure) so that in the elaborated iconography seen here the tail of the 'horse' ridden by the archer either coils like a snake or acquires the venomous form of the raised scorpion tail.[19] It follows that both scorpion and archer sharing a single form must share a single function, which for Coomaraswamy, is to identify and defend the designated space. Precisely what this space contains is made clear in scenes carved elsewhere on Mesopotamian seals and *kudurru* boundary stones of the second millennium BCE, where the centaur, often double-headed and winged, but bearing aloft the scorpion sting, acts as guardian and defender of the Tree of Life or radiant pillar.[20]

Now that three different styles of north-south roadways across the skies of day and night have been identified, it will be easier to understand how Circe and Kalypso fit into the esoteric astronomy underlying the epic. No more than sisters 'under the skin', perhaps, but the bond between the two goddesses is replicated in the persons of other brothers, sometimes twins, who perform similar roles to those of Circe and Kalypso as markers of the upper and lower hemispheres surrounding our globe.

The Twins in Gemini

At the north node of Rahu, the twins of Gemini indicate the head of the nodal dragon. Coomaraswamy finds himself in agreement with those who believe[21] that the Gemini twins are guardians of this location, as are also the twin Hindu Asvin brothers.[22] This strengthens the case for the Gemini / Taurus intersection as a place of considerable importance, and particularly so as it is the 'corresponding opposite' of Sagittarius / Scorpio. The putative *axis* ('dragon line') unites the two, providing opportunities for 'two-way traffic' so evocative of the to-and-fro of the golden shuttle of Circe and Kalypso.

Both the cosmic tree and nodal dragon belong equally in the world picture of the Inca and Maya[23] and are also attested in European, Asiatic and Middle Eastern thinking. The reason is not hard to find, for the path of the dragon and the path of the Milky Way were universally observed to span the celestial vault along an identical highway, flowing like a river or winding sinuously like a snake, their movement so similar that one is easily accommodated to the other, as they are in the Greek *ourobouros*, the tail-biting snake who often configures Okeanos. So they are conceptually merged, one with the other, the one visible, the other theoretical but potent with implications regarding the 'life and death' of the eclipsing Sun and Moon. The early creation literature of the Persians, the *Greater Bundahishn,* provides a precise correspondence of Dragon and

Way and their curving arc of juncture, which virtually identifies them as a single path:[24]

> "This mark in the sky, which they call the Milky Way, is the brilliance of the Dragon, the serpent which is in the firmament." *Bundahishn* 52, 12, 5.

What has emerged from this review of three possible highways across the sky is the very great importance of the two termini, the end points of the *axis*. As places of beginning, ending, or turning round, they are thresholds of change, hence doorways, and every doorway needs its guardian. Circe and Kalypso fall smoothly into this important role as keepers of the gate. It will become apparent that this conclusion holds good whether their narrative functions in the sequence of adventures or their astronomical placements in Taurus / Gemini (Circe) or Sagittarius / Scorpio (Kalypso) are under discussion.

Whichever route is taken as a road to eternity, the object in all cases seems to be to find the due centre of the sky, as it is defined by the phenomena discussed in this chapter. If it is subject to change the centre cannot be eternal. For this reason the relatively stable Pole Star has been the focus of interest since time immemorial. But the Sun as the life-giving force also attracts much interest, as does the path of the Milky Way, seemingly populated with a multitude of stars which are imaginably souls of the departed already embarked on their journey. The one place which draws together all four, Sun, soul, Milky Way and centre, is the Galactic Centre itself: in the middle of the Way, visited by the Sun, and at one time the home of the Pole Star. The next chapter will consider other features of the Galactic Centre and the extent of its correspondence with Homer's description of the entrance to Hades.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CROSSING THE FORD

This hymn of praise, to the great god Rudra, names the significant places where the god is to be found. The use of terrestrial geography to define his movements suggests an itinerary for the aspirant soul:

> "Homage to him of the ford and to him of the bank.
> Homage to him beyond and to him on this side.
> Homage to him who crosseth over and to him who crosseth back.
> Homage to him of the crossing and to him of the ocean."
>
> *Taittiriya Samhita*, 4.5.8

The gods of India cross frequently from heaven to Earth in the form of rivers, or fire, or sunlight, effortlessly spanning the distance between the sky and the land and just as effortlessly returning whence they came just like their Greek counterparts. They sanctify a path which in time becomes the path sought out by the individual searching for a way to paradise and preparing for his eventual demise. In the meantime the individual must be content to act out the journey by visiting and performing sacred rituals at the crossing places on one or more of the sacred rivers of India, of which there are several, habitually conceived as 'heaven-born'. In a culture whose earliest civilisation flourished along the Indus Valley, the river was granted a richly symbolic function as a passage from death to life and life to death; it nourished, it refreshed, and it came from Heaven. Little wonder therefore that its fords or *tirthas* where people could approach and enter the water, and even cross to the other side, grew to represent those places where a man could feel close to his gods. As original sources of the river-on-Earth, the celestial rivers of the ecliptic or Milky Way presented a model paradigm of certain great paths to Heaven which were frequently intersected by other equally powerful 'roads', such as the ecliptic coinciding with the Way, or with the plane of the Equator, for instance, or the pole of the north.

Much has been written in recent chapters concerning the north-south paths configured by the Way, the rainbow or the nodal dragon, which correspond to the verticality of the *axis* as a 'ladder' or a stairway. Now a new direction has to be understood, a horizontal transition more in the

nature of a bridge crossing from one bank to another which provides ease of passage to the other side. Although the great bridges of myth such as the rainbow bridge, *Bifrost*, celebrated in Norse tradition, and the *Cinvat* or *Chinwat* which conveys the departed souls in ancient Zoroastrianism are generally considered 'vertical' bridges spanning the separate storeys of the universe, there might be a case for considering them as arching bridges at the end of the path; they would link the axial road to the final crossing over the deadly water, then lead the souls safely from the side that means 'death' over to the side that means 'life'. Many ancient cultures preserve stories of bridges which will not tolerate a sinner (their bones are found below the bridge; is this perhaps why there is a bone graveyard on the beach of the Sirens' island?), or bridges which swing, or shake, or turn back to deposit their passenger on the bank he has just left. Sometimes the bridge leads to a magical island, which is certainly an encouragement to see these as 'bridges to Paradise'.

Just such a message is conveyed by the Vedic *tirtha*,[1] the ford or crossing place. From the earliest literary mention, and whether it is 'found' in a forest, on a mountain, in a temple or by a stream, the *tirtha* is a holy place where the way to the gods may be breached. The essential element was a water source fit for washing, purifying or drinking, though since the pilgrimage to a *tirtha* was pre-eminently an action dedicated to "an interior journey",[2] the quality of the water was 'spiritually' guaranteed by the sanctity of the site, for this was a sacred doorway or threshold, a liminal or 'twilight' place hence symbolically 'pure'. The two banks of the river to be crossed are characterised by extreme dualities: on one side lie good and evil, hunger and thirst, birth, old age and death, but these do not exist on the further bank, the one beyond, the one most desired. This philosophy is elaborated in the earlier *Vedas* and *Brahmanas*. Over time, the crossing was increasingly understood as a symbol of the transition from ignorance to knowing and from spiritual darkness to the light of immortality, where there would be no sorrow or pain, but only the glory of the light of Brahman. The *Maitri Upanishad* (6.21-28) even compares the ascent of the yogin, who travels on his 'breath', with the spider climbing up his own thread, a most perilous, insubstantial bridge; but the same yogin will come eventually to a doorway where he must slay the doorkeeper, who is called 'egoism' ('self' or 'self-interest'). Only then, and voyaging on the 'raft' created by the sound Om will he gain the other side "of the space in the heart", having passed beyond all pain, all the dualities, and all the self-obsession that has kept him imprisoned on the other side of the river.

This material has been quoted at some length for its relevance to the metaphysical aspect of Odysseus' journey. As the story unfolds (of the

hero's journey around the ecliptic circle and up the length of the great sky-bridge) the various doorway episodes offer him 'fording places' where he might, had he been sufficiently knowledgeable or spiritually mature, have proceeded to 'the other bank'. He has to overcome the restraining dualities implicit in the human experience, he has to cast aside that very humanity which bound him to material existence, and he has to find the pure 'place of the heart', which will lie in his own hall and in the welcoming presence of Penelope.

Of course, the esoteric, interior journey has been formulated in terms of a terrestrial geography, modelled in turn on the cosmic geography of the night sky. It cannot be doubted that the doctrine of the earthly *tirtha* took its inspiration from a river-crossing among the stars, a place where a confluence or divergence of visible 'rivers' was bisected by a dark space, itself inevitably interpreted as a river between two banks. On one side lay mortality and inevitable death; on the other, the blissful state where all human suffering came to an end. For those who failed to make the crossing, the outcome would be descent into the darkness and possibly entry into the realm of Hades. This same confluence could therefore represent either the entry point to Heaven or Olympos, or the doorway to Hades in the Underworld.

These possibilities offer a way to approach the Homeric description of Hades and the paradise island of Scheria, not in the context of a journey to islands across salty oceans, but as a journey between doorways on that ecliptic circle which spans the cosmic darkness. Once the spiralling circle of the Sun's daily and annual revolutions is complete, the traveller will have been lifted so high in the skies that he may find the doorway which allows him to voyage beyond the Sun. This achieved, he will soon to be engaged in negotiating the major highways of the empyrean and their several windows into the Otherworld.

Some final observations on the meeting place of the rivers will help to confirm that we have in all likelihood stumbled upon the correct manifestation of the original *tirtha,* at the one and only celestial conjunction capable of inspiring a complex and universal mythology of the crossing place between worlds. It lies at the due centre of the sky, at the top of the *axis*. But to discover precisely where that *axis* is fixed, it has to be asked, where did the earliest philosophers imagine that central point to be? What, and where, is the 'nail of the sky'?

Of Trees and Birds

In legend and literature, art and artefact, the crown of the tree which corresponds to the highest heaven is marked by a bird or birds which perch or nest on its branches, or in the case of an artefact such as the *axis*-sceptre, stand proud at its tip. In many cultures, it is traditional to place a star, angel or bird at the tip of our Christmas trees in a barely remembered tribute to the tree-as-*axis*. Although recognisable at primary level as a symbol of communication with the heights to which the mind flies in adoration, or in hope of power, the bird also represents a reverse flow, the descent of the divine Logos, as it appears in the form of the white dove of the Holy Spirit which descends on Jesus' tree-cross of crucifixion. Since they belong to both worlds, the birds have a potent role as divine messengers and heralds of destiny, to which must be added their role as symbols of the human soul. It is very often the soul-bird which is shown roosting in the Cosmic Tree. Yet there is considerable evidence to show that the bird of ancient myth and symbol often relates to a visible 'bird in the skies' formed by such asterisms as Cygnus the swan or Aquila the eagle. Consequently the search for a cosmic avian model will involve birds in relation to trees, trees as symbols of the Milky Way, and all three in contexts suggestive of a road to the Afterlife.

I am particularly indebted to Andrew Collins' survey of traditions relating to the star group Cygnus [3] and especially the brightest of its stars, Deneb, which is relevant to the iconography of the Milky Way Egyptian goddess, Nut, where, as we have already seen, it marked the daily 'birth place' of the Sun from the body of the goddess (figure VII-13). The author quotes a representation of Nut on the ceiling of the temple of Seti (who ruled from c.1309-1291 BCE) which is inscribed as follows in an address to the goddess:

> "The uniform darkness, fount of the gods,
> The place from which the birds come…
> Open to the Duat [Underworld] that is on her northern side
> With her rear in the east and her head in the west."[4]

Directional problems aside, this is a remarkable chain of ideas involving divinity, a source (perhaps of waters?) a home of the birds, and an entrance to the Underworld which in Egyptian doctrine, as in the Homeric, is a necessary stage in soul evolution. The exact position of the goddess ("rear in the east," etc.) suggests that there is an optimum time for the opening of that entrance into the Underworld.

A similar mythology emerges from the preserved oral and historical records of sky-watching by traditional societies of South, North and Central America, Britain and Northern Europe, as well as other communities scattered throughout the Asian steppes, the early homeland of shamanism. Even as distantly as China there are stories concerning the Cygnus asterism of nine stars as the *Tianjin* or 'Ford of the Sky' bridging the dark space between two rivers. One well-loved legend tells of the forbidden love of the Weaver Princess for a common herdsman. Kept apart on the orders of the Jade Emperor and isolated each side of a *celestial* river, the young people were destined never to meet. But on the seventh day of the seventh month all the magpies in the world came together to build them a 'magpie bridge' of twigs across the watery divide. Only then were the lovers reunited by traversing the ford across the waters, when at last, but briefly, they could enjoy their mutual love. The 'bridge of the birds' is interpreted as the bridge of Cygnus and his companion stars which span the dark space between the arms of the Way. Deneb, the

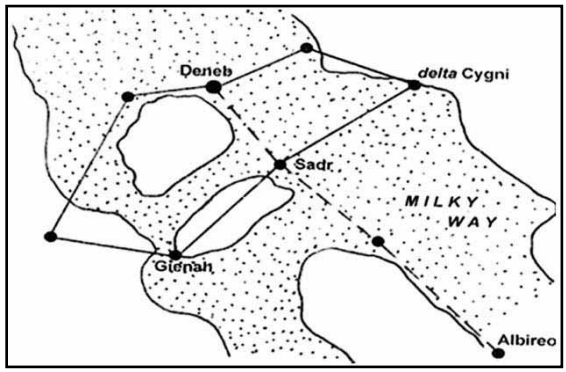

Figure VIII-13

brightest, is the 'tail' of the swan whose long 'neck' extends in the other direction towards a 'beak' in another bright star, Albireo. The Cygnus 'wings' stretching from *delta* Cygni to Gienah provide that simulacrum of a land bridge which is in position when the bird lies firmly in the cleft of the Way (figure VIII-13).

Deneb in Cygnus

The importance of this particular space becomes apparent when the legends relating to swans and geese are examined as cosmic symbols, or, at a minimum, as imagery inspired by an astronomical relative. One example which is relevant to the topography of Hades as we have it from Homer concerns the sacred city of Cuzco ('navel') which lies high in the Andes of the Incas. It is a ceremonial site at the centre of an empire known to its people as the 'Four Quarters of the Earth', the quarters in question being defined by a four-part division of the sky mirrored below in a built landscape. The temple complex, Coricancha, contained an observatory equipped to observe and measure movement in the sky, but by now the reader will not be surprised to learn that the central courtyard also held an eight-sided stone chest known as the 'uncovered navel stone', of unknown function. Coricancha as a dual symbol of the world centre was constructed close to the confluence of rivers Tullumayu and Huatanay, where they flow into the sacred river Vilcanota which reflects Mayu, the main body of the Milky Way. The result is a sacred navel stone placed centrally within the most sacred and central place of the Incan Empire, at the point of confluence which interprets the meeting of the two rivers in the sky. Moreover, in the form of the puma which the Incans 'found' within the landscape and enhanced, the temple with its stone lies over the area corresponding to the genitals of the puma. Once again the legend of Nut and her 'birthplace of the Sun' between her thighs come to mind as essentially the same mythologem, and since the opening of the galactic cleft with its bright star Deneb is invoked in terrestrial format by the navel stone of Cuzco, it appears this society had chosen to create a 'sacred navel' to act as a ritual focus to activities intended to link their earthbound community to its place of origins where their gods resided. This was their 'world above', the world of creation, where 'souls of the noble dead' (but not the peasantry) were destined to return, guided by the starry trail of Mayu, the sacred river. Others of a lesser kind went to a separate destination, but as before, the rivers showed them their route: those heading to the land of the fortunate took their departure from Cygnus and voyaged along the northerly arm, while those destined for the 'south' had to make their way towards Crux, the Southern Cross.[5] Presumably the existence of a ford in the form of the wings of Cygnus made it possible to step from one path to another, according to the fated destination of the individual. Hence a full eschatology and a road of the dead was developed by the Incas around the pattern of the stars of Cygnus in the Milky Way,

which could conceivably be the same picture elaborated in the eastern Mediterranean of the late Bronze Age.

Admittedly it is a very long way from the Andes to Greece. We can scarcely be dealing with diffusion here, but rather with the workings of a system which uses the same imaginative tools to make sense of the world as experienced, and to preserve that knowledge by any means available: be it oral history, myth or legend, art or artefact.

'Rock of Heaven'

There are so many points of similarity between Cuzco's prototype in the galactic formation and the description of the way to Hades of the tenth and the last books of the *Odyssey*, that there is no hesitation in attributing the White Rock of the latter to the very bright, very pure light of the star Deneb, an 'island' afloat in the cosmic sea of the night. And when one considers the regular event which brings the Sun on its ecliptic path into the region of the Cygnus asterism at the winter solstice, the "gates of the sun" will indeed lie close to the White Rock, also close to the "mouldering pathway" of the Dark Rift.

Remarkably, Egypt displayed the same interest in a primeval rock as the point of origin for their civilisation in the form of the mythic primordial mound which emerged from the waters of creation. Inevitably, this important symbol received a great deal of elaboration, both conceptually and in the concrete forms of art and architecture. It was a 'fountain of energy' drawing upon the deeps, and imbued with the power to carry the soul of a body, buried in proximity, to its earthly counterparts from this life into the next, or into rebirth. It fulfils the same role as the cosmic mountain, as a marker of the centre of space and the source of all that comes into being. Its scaled-down counterpart is the *ben-ben* stone (*pyramidion*) mounted on the obelisk but also guarded in the holy of holies at the innermost heart of the temple where the god resides.[6] The stone also shares its name with the purple heron (also '*bnw'*) who is the phoenix, symbol of the rising Sun.

Particularly worth noting is that the same primordial mount splits in two to release the creator god, Atum-Ra, the principle of light, often shown upholding the disk of the Sun.[7] After this event, this mound resolves into the twin peaks of the double horizon so fundamental to the solar-based philosophy of ancient Egypt, where the same two mountains of the east and west horizons reappear as the twin pylon doors of the temple and as the representatives of 'life' and 'death'.

Nicolas Wyatt has followed the theme through Ugarit and Israelite texts to provide his readers with a substantial body of written evidence relating to the sacred stone as the focus of ritual in many Near Eastern cultures. But the feature which should interest us here should be the possibility of a cosmic prototype, a model in the night sky. Therefore the most helpful clues provided by these texts are those which associate the stone with twin phenomena, such as the split mountains just discussed, or confluent / divergent rivers. Mount Saphon, on the Syro-Turkish border, is one such divided mountain which has a split profile, like Mount Parnassos where the Greek *omphalos* stone resided; the same twin-peaked or saddle-backed mountain appears in several other eastern cosmologies. The following lines translated from the Ugaritian language[8] speak of deity, mountain, temple, hill, power and place of origin in association with an Otherworldly condition or place:

> "Come, and I shall reveal it in the midst of my divine mountain, Saphon,
> in the sanctuary, on the mountain of my inheritance,
> in Paradise, in the hill of victory."

The god resides *in* or *on* his hill in many instances, and is identified with it, as in *Psalm* 18. 2, which addresses the psalmist's Lord as rock, fortress, God, strength, deliverer, buckler, horn of salvation and high tower. Confusingly, but by subtle and fluid associations now largely lost to us, the stone / mountain merges with the throne of god or king, and with the temple or palace where stone, throne or king resides; the garden of paradise is also to be found on the sacred mountain, but it will be recreated in the temple precinct. Every temple is a centre, an *omphalos*, and a constructed equivalent of the primordial hill, so the earthly replica carries within its walls all the values associated with its prototype. Thus there emerges an ascending-descending scale wherein the sky feature (a star or stars) is read as a rock or mountain, a mountain of adequate verisimilitude is then identified on Earth, and the temple or palace replicates that mountain at the same time as it invokes the numinous power and presence of the celestial model (its 'god'). But the hill is equally the site of the tree as *axis mundi*, which climbs up into the sky. Temples, towers, ziggurats and pyramids built over a sacred foundation stone reached up into the skies in order to be close to the places of origin which they desire to replicate, especially the stars and rivers of stars. Frequently it is a particular star group which is the focus of attention. In a short Egyptian spell, reference is made both to the "sycamore in the sky" (the up-reaching tree) and to the "Great Cackler" or primeval gander / goose, who laid the first "egg" from which all life emerges.[9] The egg is a simple variant on the

life-giving rock or stone, so this is almost certainly the 'egg' of Cygnus, the white bird, and must be one of her stars, most likely Deneb at the 'parting of the rivers' (figure VIII-13). The egg is commonly used to express the 'seed of manifestation' in the biological metaphors of Hindu, Chinese, Celtic and Greek cosmogonies, to name but a few; and whose egg should it be, other than a celestial bird's? Laid on the surface of the primordial waters, just like the emergent hill out of the floods, the egg often divides to give either Heaven and Earth, or upper and lower hemispheres. The Egyptian egg was laid on that primeval hill of which we have already spoken, and from it emerged the god Khnum, who brought order to the universe. (We must not forget the mating of Zeus with Leda the swan, which some say generated the Dioskouroi, the heavenly twins, and their sister Helen).[10] All these overlays imply that the celestial original of stone, hill and egg is to be found among the stars of the white bird, Cygnus, which in consideration of the generative power of all three, makes the division of the Milky Way rivers the location of both Heaven and/or Olympos, and the Underworld, Hades, the entrance to one lying close to the other but leading in opposite directions, as they do from Homer's Cave of the Nymphs. This possibility will be explored in later chapters when we come to review the topography of the Plain of Troy and the location of ancient Olympia, which also appear to imbue their physical geography with the symbolic functions of a stellar prototype.

Far closer to Greek sources than the world of Egyptian mythology, and closer to Greek philosophy also, is the delicate craft work of the Minoans of Crete and the mainland Mycenaeans who embraced and absorbed Cretan culture. One example stands out as relevant to our argument, although unfortunately its provenance is open to major doubt. It is the 'Tree of Nestor', engraved on the gold ring which was named for the elder statesman of Homer's two Epics.

'The Ring of Nestor'

If, and only if, the so-called 'Ring of Nestor' (figure VIII-14) which was accepted as authentic by the archaeologist of Knossos, Sir Arthur Evans, does truly give a vision of a Minoan view of the way to the Afterlife as he claimed,[11] then we possess a visual record of an early Greek idea of a river-like tree (with upright trunk and two horizontal branches) harbouring bird-headed spirits being welcomed by guides to the next world. Evans discusses other examples, Egyptian and Mesopotamian, in which the confluence of rivers is associated with the arrival of the dead man by boat in the 'Islands of the Blest'; and, he says, the channel opening

below the confluence of the two stands in these related scenes for "the haven of arrival from across the water".[12] "World-wide occurrence" is claimed by him for the motif which imagines the departing soul crossing a river or gulf, as indeed it is in Greek and Roman traditions of the river Styx, its ferryman Charon, and Cerberus the guardian dog. The tree of the 'Ring of Nestor' has a dog at its foot, crouched on the mound which might represent to the cosmic mountain. The trunk and branches are solid and 'woody' with the exception of the right hand arm which has a more watery appearance. The scene is not a static one, for the 'souls' are being led or encouraged, on the left of the scene, towards the centre of the tree, and others raise hands in imploration to the lion on an altar table, top right. It is a fascinating scheme interpreting an otherwordly change of condition, and has sufficient appropriate detail to encourage my own belief in its authenticity, even if the design has been falsified from random images now lost to us.

Perhaps the spirits are being coaxed to 'climb the tree' or to seek salvation at the point where the rivers or branches meet; and since many are bird-headed, it is possible that they are being assimilated to a particular bird at a particular point in the sky, which may be the brightest star, Deneb, in the group of the Swan, Cygnus.

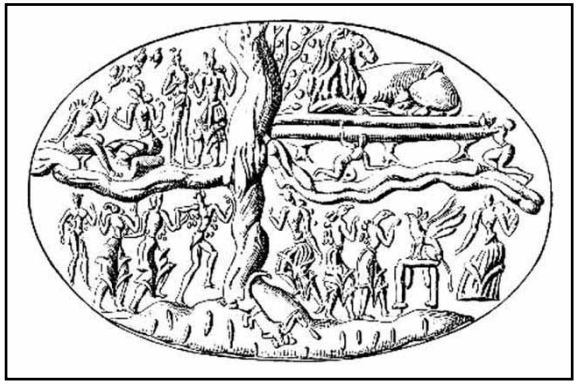

Figure VIII-14

Deneb

The star Deneb was the Pole Star in approximately 16,500-14,300 BCE, until as a result of Precession other stars of the Cygnus group moved into the pole position. The basic astronomical facts are that in the northern

hemisphere the part of the Milky Way most visible in the rainy season of October shows the Dark Rift marked by the scattered stars of Cygnus, whose imprint resembles nothing more than the spread claws of a bird's foot or the body of an open-winged bird. At the winter solstice in December, and no other, the Sun will align with Deneb in the rift between the rivers ('thighs of Nut'). So, with its tail at Deneb and its beak in Albireo, the asterism of Cygnus is flying in the direction of the dark opening of the separating arms of the Way, hence (when the Way is in north-south position) he flies towards the southern horizon, which is the usual destination of most northern migrators. In Finland and other far northern countries the rising of the Milky Way after dark in autumn actually coincides with the winter departure of the birds for the south or south-west (especially in that near-Arctic climate, the white birds of seas, lakes and rivers). They will have been seen to disappear over the southern horizon, to the place where the Milky Way fell from sight, for reasons we nowadays understand as an annual migration. Without that knowledge - and who could imagine the distances the birds would fly? the departure and return after the winter season of what was conceived to be not the original, but a totally new flight of birds, was proof of the power of the south to 'resurrect' or 'renew' from a death-place. This avian departure and return must have been an important causative principle in the formulation of human life as a function of seasonal change. Even today, the useful tale of the white stork that brings the new baby ('life') to its happy parents receives the occasional airing. The Deneb mythology can also be traced to ancient India, where the creator-god, Brahma, took the swan-goose Hamsa as his divine vehicle, or harnessed his chariot to a flight of such birds, much as Apollo rode his swan chariot when descending to Earth from the skies. As well as its counterpart the Ganges, the river Sarasvati (now lost through geological change) served as the Earth-model of the Milky Way, and possessed its accompanying celestial swan-maiden, also Sarasvati, who is an Asian parallel of Nut. To this we can add that the whiteness of Hamsa, the swan or goose (cf. Latin *anser*) expresses the purity relevant to 'universal spirit', 'Self' or '*atman'*, the creative force. Most telling is the designation which speaks of Hamsa as dwelling in the *bindu*, which is the white heart of the spiritual *mandala*, hence the centre of the world, a fact confirmed by modern astronomers who believe they have found a link between Hamsa the swan-goose and the stars of Cygnus in ancient Vedic astronomy.[13]

There is fundamentally little difference in the symbolism of a white island, a white stone, a White Rock, or for that matter, a white bird, when all relate to a common source. It will be useful to see how they overlap.

The Stone

It has been suggested here that the Cuzco navel-stone was intended as a central marker and an aligned equivalent of the Deneb star at the centre point of the meeting of the Milky Way rivers. The idea can be taken further. Stones, whether precious jewels or the raw product of the Earth, have long been venerated as homes of the deity or some numinous spirit, and none more so than those stones which fall from the sky as meteorites, 'heaven-born', as if from the solid vault-like arch of the sky as a cave. Far from being static and lifeless, they are capable of 'giving birth', yielding up gold and jewels and precious ores, for example, and in the case of Deukalion the stones that he casts upon the ground are explained as the 'bones' of a future generation. In theory the stone should serve as a static contrast to the living, growing tree, but it is not inevitably so: they actually complement each other as mutual representatives of eternity and the cycle of life and death respectively.

But is there a navel-stone marker in the sky? The Buryat people, who set a 'sky-stone' in a casket at the top of their image of the World Pillar at the centre of their village, must have thought so. The sacrifices and libations made to the stone itself were performed in the hopes of the gift of fertilising rains from the skies. The magical ability of stones to give birth in some form or another, is attested by, for example, the opening a spring of water from a stone struck by Moses (*Exodus* 17. 6); while stones which yield such luxuries as honey, oil or bread are commonplaces of ancient belief. Even more interesting for our purpose is the stone which gives birth to man or deity.

In her first real encounter with Odysseus in his beggar's garb and as yet unrecognised, Penelope enquires into the identity, the city and the parentage of the guest in her hall. Her speech resuming the state of affairs in Ithaka and summarising her strategy of her weaving and unweaving of the shroud of Laertes reveals a woman finally at the end of her resistance, wasting away and losing her beauty (19, 104f.; 123-164). Faced with the unprepossessing appearance of Odysseus, she states robustly and perhaps with a degree of sarcasm, "You were not born from any fabulous oak, or a boulder." (163). Opinions will certainly vary as to what this line could possibly mean, but my own reading sees a reference in the first item to an oracular oak such as the oak of Dodona, or similar, which is connected with the voice and the will of the gods, hence axial in function; the other option is a 'heaven stone' associated (or at least, bracketed with) this cosmic tree, to which an astronomical meaning may attach. At a guess, it would be men of great quality, even divine, who would be born from such

a place, such as the god Mithras, also traditionally "rock-born". The beggar would certainly not qualify for such an ancestry, hence the irony.

Finally, there is the fabled stone swallowed by Kronos to deceive Ouranos, the Sky. As Hesiod tells the story, Kronos ('Time') was born of the union of Earth and Sky. A crooked and scheming fellow, Kronos was coaxed by his mother into taking a sharp sickle and cutting off the genitals of the father who was consuming his own, hated sons by his partner Earth. The sickle was formed from "grey flint", hard stone.[14] But the same son of Earth inflicted a cruel fate on his own offspring by Rhea, gulping them down soon after birth to prevent the usurping of his role; finally and in despair as she was about to deliver great Zeus, the goddess fled to Crete and delivered the babe in a cave, deep under the Earth, therefore 'Earth-born' or even 'rock-born'. Leaving the baby in a cave under Mount Aegaeum, Rhea carried to the mighty Kronos, "a great stone" wrapped in swaddling clothes, which the cannibal parent duly "thrust down".[15]

The most revealing sequel to this story, as told in *Theogony*, lines 500-503, describes the eventual fate of the regurgitated stone: "And Zeus set it fast in the wide-pathed Earth at goodly Pytho under the glens of Parnassus, to be a sign thenceforth and a marvel to mortal men."

Hesiod does not tell his reader the source of the stone; it may be Cretan or it may be imagined as part of the fabric of Mount Olympos or even the stony vault of the sky, but it appears to end its days as the *omphalos* stone of the oracular site at Delphi at the foot of the double-peaked mountain, Parnassos, deep in its valleys or glens. This should have the dreadful effect of 'closing the doorway to heaven'. There are hints here of a precessional myth of change in which the stone marker of the central sky (a Pole Star perhaps?) was swallowed by Kronos in his capacity as Time. So when the adult Zeus was able to free his uncles from the dreadful bonds imposed by Kronos, and happily went on to rule both men and gods, he instituted a New Age, the Age of Silver which followed the Golden Age ruled by Kronos. Zeus survived the Silver Age long enough to institute a new one, the Bronze Age, and to generate a strange but powerful race of men "sprung from ash-trees".[16] Perhaps the closing of the previous doorway interprets the precessional shift which establishes a new world centre, at a new doorway.

Precessional or not, and the question is too vast to be answered here, the tale at its simplest relates that a stone once placed in the stomach ('navel-place') of a god is brought down below and positioned on the Earth but above a chasm into the world below. Initially it was to be a sign and great marvel, but ultimately (as history finally tells) it was to act as marker to the centre of the Earth. Once the knowledge that Delphi was

founded below a split mountain of two ‘arms’ is factored into the equation, the unavoidable fact emerges that after the *omphalos* stone was taken from the sky’s centre, its ‘belly’, it found a new home in a ‘cleft’ which so resembles the Dark Rift between the arms of the Milky Way.

From such speculations we turn at last to the burning question of the hero journey of Odysseus, his destination, his trials and his final homecoming.

PART II:

THE WESTERN SEMICIRCLE

CHAPTER NINE

A CIRCULAR JOURNEY FROM TROY TO LAISTRYGONIA

It is a drastic step to bypass centuries of scholarly quests for the 'true' geography of the Homeric world. Many plausible matches have been found, after all, between the topography of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as well as the correspondence of the epics with sundry Mediterranean locations: but none gives an entirely satisfactory explanation of the erratic results of such realism, nor does it offer any certainty that the poet was not applying known or reported landscapes to an imaginary world of his own devising. Our desire to know, to see, to go there has perhaps mired us in terrestrial realities. The alternative interpretation offered here is based on sacred, not physical geography and proposes that an ideal landscape has been projected on to the skies above.

The remarkably consistent and tightly-engineered structures of the Adventures must one day reveal Homer's deepest intentions, if only because not a few of the poet's many admirers have been seeking an answer to what must be counted an even greater matter than the long-debated 'Homeric problem' concerning authorship of the epics. From the early allegorists' attempts to find a meaningful subtext to Homer's poetic discourse, to Pico della Mirandola's instinctive sense that a particularly significant philosophy lay beneath the account of a voyage,[1] and to the efforts of the twentieth century Structuralist school to refine multiple 'balancing elements' and to extract some sense from them, Homer's intention glitters with only a random light and the message remains obscure. (Others, of course, will argue that there is no message to be found, and will find none). And with every passing decade, and despite considerable advances in archaeology and Homeric scholarship, any true sense of how society in the second and first millennia BCE thought and felt about their place in the world and how that world was related to a wider, astronomical scheme of things has remained largely beyond our grasp. The growth of scientific astronomy has cast a shadow over the first attempts of man to describe and interpret what he saw in the stars above him, and all the more so because the language of those first descriptions,

being 'mythic', was closer to the language of now-discredited science of astrology than to 'true' astronomy. Another cause of this neglect of Homeric cosmology[2] must be our insistence on processes associated with reason, proof, physical or literary validation of any hypothesis. These are the indispensable tools of modern scholarship but they need not totally inhibit our instinctive grasp on ancient realities. The two can work in tandem, though the methodology must change.

With the *Apologoi*, we are in the fortunate possession of a highly developed and undeniably structured framework against which our imaginings may be put to the test. Since neither the story teller's craft nor the interests of the narrative require what is fundamentally a geometric model on this vast scale, and since such a complex series could scarcely emerge spontaneously in performance from the traditional building blocks of the singer, the *Apologoi* must be considered the product of considerable forethought and planning. Similar to a ring composition in that it returns to its point of departure (the island of Kalypso), and, as will be shown, with diagonally reflecting episodes which create the same binding effect as the repeating lines of the ring composition, the hugely intricate model is elaborated across four whole books of the *Odyssey* (9 to 12) and simultaneously links its story to the other twenty in a series of anticipations and recollections.

As it progresses, the *Odyssey* introduces oppositional adventures playing upon themes of remembrance (memory or knowledge) and forgetting (ignorance or error) which are highlighted by the hero's waking and sleeping and his fellow travellers' accumulating blunders and their successive deaths. Odysseus finally completes his journey alone and faces his destiny alone. The companions have accompanied him in a series of trials which he alone proves capable of withstanding. This is the 'soul journey' of a culture hero crafted on the same model as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*; moreover, the heroes of other Asian Epics display similar accomplishments cast as adventures into enlightenment.

There have been very many interpretations of the *Apologoi* by great scholars of the past, each in its own way admirable but never quite definitive. Each of us currently studying Homer 'stands on the shoulders of giants' in this respect, but equally everyone brings to the work a personal insight which is born not only of individual skills but also notable events in the culture of our times. Most significantly, in this age of technological advances, our culture currently possesses the computer software to establish beyond dispute the exact position in relation to each other of all the stars and planets of the universe and their movements at any given hour of any day in any century, however distant. It can

moreover verify major events such as eclipses which may be discussed as realities when analysing some of the more exacting metaphors of the poetry.

Homer must lead the way, of course, and imagination may follow; science such as astronomical verities may be drawn into the fuller analysis when appropriate, while metaphysical tradition can assist the unravelling of multiple layers of meaning. Finally (and this cannot be stressed too much) the whole must make sense *from multiple directions*. Ideally the interpretation should solve not only the meaning of the *Apologoi* but should find a home in known contexts of developing religions, philosophies and cultural priorities, as well as stretching out to find support in the content and tenor of the companion-text of the *Iliad* to underline and confirm its own validity. This is undeniably a challenging and perhaps impossible ambition. Nevertheless the narrative structure considered here as the foundation of an esoteric theory has yielded some remarkable correspondences which go far towards the ideals outlined in this paragraph. What has emerged from the present structural analysis is a mathematical figure which in Pythagorean style comprises a message in itself. (And as a later thinker was to say, the medium *is* the message).

The Circle and the Line

These are two prime forms from which emerge a simple cosmogram containing all that the enquiring mind may need to know about its present and future place in the wider universe. The circle in question is completed in twenty four hours and repeated, by the Sun, just over three hundred and sixty five times as it rises, sets and returns to the east along its great ecliptic. At two points on the circle it appears (at dawn) and disappears (at sunset), a universally observed feature which provides a powerful metaphor for life and death and the mythologem of Eternal Return. Little wonder therefore that the points of greatest solar ascendency and descent (zenith and nadir, on the solstice points of summer and winter) also enter into the paradigm as complementary features, most easily imagined as the vertical dimension which bisects the horizontal. Number mysticism related to the daily transit and the greater circle of the year further extends a system based on experience of the twenty four hours, by the introduction of references to the four seasons and the three hundred and sixty five days of the year. Evidence of Homeric number symbolism, too, will arise in the course of this reconstruction, but it will not prove to be an isolated instance of poetic imagination.

To begin with the purely geometric basis of the series of Adventures, the circle has been proposed as the prime figure. There are several reasons for this, not least of which is the circularity of Odysseus' narration which begins and ends with the island of Kalypso and resolutely refuses to overstep the point of return to this goddess (12, 450-453). Another equally important consideration is the great Shield of Achilleus described in book 18 of the *Iliad* (478-607), around which the blacksmith threw "a shining / triple rim" (479). Although the poet tells us that his shield contains all the constellations, the only ones he names (and these may be those bearing greatest relevance to life in his time) are the Pleiades, the Hyades, and the Bear who 'looks at' Orion (485-487). The Bear is to be associated with the celestial north; the Pleiades rise in the east at night, cross the zenith and sink in the west; and Orion, who circles the horizon at night and is "gazed upon" by the Bear, can only be 'south' or 'below' in respect of the more elevated positions of the Bear (a circumpolar constellation) and the Pleiades who span the night skies. It is important to know that the great constellation containing the giant archer, Orion, never disappears completely from the night sky; instead he ducks and dives around the horizon, not always completely visible, but always detectable to the sharpest eye. If one were seeking a male figure to complete a circular journey around the Earth, Orion would be a fine candidate for a prototype of Odysseus.

Between them the four constellations mentioned here quarter the heavens, but this will not prove to be their only function in Homer's cosmological scheme, for as the story progresses they will be shown to be markers of far higher functions relating to the genesis of the soul.

Our choice of the circle as the introductory figure draws in part but not uncritically on the traditional compass pattern, which uses the Equator as the base line of east to west and the Arctic and Antarctic extremes as definition of north and south; the same pattern could be extended out into space by the projection of a celestial Equator and an extended polar axis. The objection here is that the compass was not invented for many centuries after the composition of the Epics so any suppositions the modern reader may make on the basis of that pattern, so well ingrained in our consciousness but not necessarily in the ancient mind, may lead to fallacious suppositions. A surer alternative is to base the circular journey on the round daily cycle of the Sun, that is, on the ecliptic path. Being a circle, the conventional directions north-south-east-west can be inscribed on the solar course, but with this difference, that they will not correspond totally with the conventional use of these terms. The advantage of using the ecliptic as a model is that it provides co-ordinates based on the

conjunction of the solar points with other significant spatial points of reference in the greater firmament, which terrestrial 'compass directions' cannot do. These 'celestial co-ordinates' will act as terrestrial co-ordinates only on the occasions when they meet the terrestrial horizon at east and west (rising and setting). Thereafter 'north' can be placed high in the sky, and 'south' directionally opposite to north, but in the invisible lower hemisphere. A distinction has to be made between north as a cardinal point, and north as 'Up' or 'zenith'; the same will apply in reverse to south as 'cardinal south', and south as 'Down' or 'nadir'. At night, these directions will be invisible in terms of solar features but the northern stars will provide an apt substitute.

Earlier it was noted that for Incan skywatchers in ancient times north was 'up', as it appears to have been in Hyperborean legend. We can now add to this information corroborative detail from a recent study of speech patterns among the Mam people of western Guatemala[3] which give a strong indication that, as suggested here, direction was predicated by this ethnic group and their Mayan ancestors on solar movements. The words for east and west translate as 'enter' and 'go out', while north and south translate as 'go up' and 'go down' ("the sides of the sky"). So it cannot be claimed as a general rule that all four cardinal directions have always operated universally in the way that our century uses them, and this may well have been the case in other equally ancient societies in the eastern Mediterranean. It will become evident that the attribution to north and south of 'up' and 'down' fits the present case much more convincingly.

The Spiralling Helix

But it is apparent that the *Apologoi* do not follow the circle consistently. So here we must introduce a reminder that the Sun does not travel along its ecliptic perpetually on a single plane. (Were it to do so, there would be no seasons). A more appropriate figure for the understanding of solar movement *and* the heroic voyage is the unbroken spiral. The daily circuit describes a closed circle which is rising whilst the spring progresses into summer (the Sun daily climbing towards its highest station on the Tropic of Cancer, at midsummer solstice) and falling whilst autumn fades into winter (and the Sun descends to the Tropic of Capricorn, at midwinter solstice). Like the vortex of the whirlpool with which Homer was familiar, it follows a near-tidal pattern of ebb and flow. On the rising phase the solar spiral elevates, and on its descent it bears down. A remarkable fact which may well be connected is that the Hesiodic and Homeric deployment of the ring composition is a narrative conversion of just such a

spiral process. The master poets display their control of meaningful structure with a device which mimics the movement of the heavens themselves. If ever there were need to prove the sincerity of poetic invocation to the divine Muses, it is to be found in this device, in the spiralling ring composition which sets the poet's lines turning on the dancing floors of the Sun. From first line to the central statement, then from that centre to the final line, the ring composition both expands and folds in upon itself so that it concludes where it began. As a poetic technique it is impressive; as an allusion to the solar rhythm (if so it be) it is profound.

Dante Alighieri used a similar device in his *Divina Commedia*, an account of the soul journey which begins in *Inferno* and sets the pilgrim "nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita", the road into the Afterlife, beginning in the wild 'forest of error' but *spiralling* down to Hades (*Inferno*) then passing via *Purgatorio*, and finally rising to *Paradiso*, which lies high on the (polar) mountain. This is where the errant soul ('Everyman') will receive his beatific vision of eternal sunlight and primal love, "which moves the sun and the other stars".[4] At last he is reunited there with his Beatrice. Not content with writing fourteen thousand lines of the most superb poetry, Dante invented a new verse form, *terza rima,* in which each tercet picks up the rhyme of lines one and three of the preceding tercet and employs it in the second line of the new verse, thus: aba, bcb, cdc, ded, etc. The 'new' is always looking back to the 'old' and building on it, ever moving forward but with backward glance; so the *terza rima* imitates the spiralling process of the spiritual journey through the mystical realms which Dante describes. A close graphic analogue is to be seen in the Greek key design which also spirals forward then loops back before resuming its forward course.

But the ring is not the only structure to create subtle connections to the wider universe and the human condition. A fusion of cosmic and domestic order / disorder characterising the final resolution of the *Odyssey,* as we intend to show it, is prefigured over and over again in verse patterns, episodic overlap, and parallels of theme and character, which illustrate the essential One-ness of all that man experiences and sees in the skies above him.

Travelling the Vertical Line

Odysseus' journey to Hades and back involves linear progression and its reversal. This is where the line confirms its place in the geometrical cosmogram, as the *axis mundi* joining Earth to Sky and Earth to

Underworld, that is, the vertical that penetrates and joins three planes. It complements the plane of the solar circle with its four 'cardinal' divisions by the addition of fifth and sixth radii emanating from the centre, 'upward' and 'downwards', thereby signalling the three dimensions of space. It is this superimposed line which provides the linear element of which we speak, notably the journey down to Hades and back. An important aspect of this vertical is reflected in associated metaphysical thinking. (It need not concern us whether the geometry reflects the metaphysic, or vice versa: they probably evolved in tandem as a means of defining the intangible).

The idiosyncratic nature of the metaphysical *axis* has already been touched upon but demands repetition: *movement along the vertical axis does not flow equally in both directions*.[5] The circles of existence (the 'serpent') which coil in a helical pattern around the tree of the garden of Eden, or the tree with golden apples in the garden of the Hesperides, or for that matter, the beech tree bearing the Argonautic golden fleece (another *axis*), is a movement which can operate in two directions, either upward (to the higher conditions) or downward, toward the lesser. To leave the plane of existence where he currently finds himself (which for a human is the Earth plane), the aspirant soul must find its way to the point where the *axis* meets the centre of that plane, whence he may begin the upward journey. This phase is referred to in the *Koran* as the 'straight' path and it is conducted under the influence of the 'Activity of Heaven' or 'divine grace'. Less fortunate are those who incur Heaven's anger, for their path leads downward to the infernal regions *from that same centre*. Thus any discussion of the *axis* must include the knowledge that it is a line of two halves pulling, or driving, in opposite directions. We will not make sense of the metaphysical geometry of the journey to Hades, the symbolism of the Cave of the Nymphs, nor the spatial relationship of the islands of Circe and Kalypso without reference to this important distinction.

Persephone's Garden

The relative positions and importance of these 'opposing paths of the vertical' and the identifying marks of the Centre (where the ways meet or part) can be found by careful examination of one early Greek myth. In terms of eschatology and the mystical rebirth of the soul, none is more crucial to Greek religion than the legend of Persephone and Demeter. On this legend as it is preserved in one of the *Homeric Hymns* was founded the great Mysteries of Eleusis. Far more than a vegetative myth, the story of Demeter's loss of her daughter is a legend elaborated in number

symbolism and solar references which establish a concordance of place and time.

In the *Hymn to Demeter*[6] which relates the rape of Persephone from a 'flowering meadow', twenty three attendant companions of the girl are named, and, with the daughter of the goddess Demeter making the twenty fourth, the image of 'day's fullness'[7] sets the scene for a 'Theft of Time' by the Lord of the Underworld. Persephone is seized by Hades and carried below and out of sight ('down'), leaving her grieving mother to lament her disappearance. Since Demeter is the goddess of the fertile harvest ('above', on Earth) the result of her grief is a fearful cessation of productivity. The contract subsequently drawn up to allow the girl to leave the gloomy darkness and return to Earth (that is, to 'rise up') "for a third part / of the encircling year" (465), namely in the *light* of spring, converts the numerical symbolism into seasonal actuality: when the return of Persephone gladdens the heart of the Earth goddess her mother Demeter, the Earth, gladly puts forth her springtime riches. The path has taken Persephone down to the Underworld and returned her to the place whence she first vanished from sight. But only Hades the god could drag her down and facilitate her return. Odysseus, we read, travelled to the mouth of Hell on the directions of Circe (whom we shall locate in the northern sky) but since he did not pass underground, he was able to return. Had he done so, he would have been trapped for eternity like those unfortunates who told him their fates: there is no journey 'up' from below without divine sanction.

There is a sound foundation to so much (if not all) of mythic abstraction, and Homer uses it most skilfully. His hero will acquaint himself with the darkness of the Underworld, he will return to the light, he will be carried between worlds (and reunion with Penelope) on a chariot drawn by magical horses just like those "which cut deep into the air" (383) carrying Persephone to reunion with her mother; he too will meet 'princesses' and 'goddesses' at wells and springs, like Demeter at the Maiden Well, the place where she mourned beneath an olive tree and where four maidens came to draw water (98-110). These young women in the *Homeric Hymn* guard a vital source of life, as surely as do Circe and Kalypso in their own 'centred' homesteads where four watercourses mark the centre of four quarters of the world. Odysseus will be as radiant in his appearances at doorways as the grain goddess Demeter, his wife will stand at a pillar like the mother of Demophoön, and on Scheria he will wait in silence to be greeted as did the disguised goddess, Demeter herself (183-194). He will tell of his adventures in retrospect, as Persephone does when describing Hades to her mother upon her release (405-433).

The *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* too, are rooted in mystery traditions. Although later commentators may have uncovered a rich seam of allegorical discourse in the work of their greatest poet that material was in no way exclusive to the author of the epics. Indeed, as we follow the circular course of Odysseus along the celestial route of the Sun we shall discover many cross-cultural affinities of the kind shared by the *Homeric Hymn* and the *Odyssey*. At the core lies the monomyth of the hero journey which takes the initiand along the path to knowledge and self-fulfilment via trials and painful rebirth, with the cosmos serving as the great theatre of his transformation.

When the hero of Troy takes leave of the site of his glorious and cunning part in the defeat of the enemy, he sets out to rediscover his homeland. He has no concept of the *hubris* awaiting him as he parts company with his fellow Achaians.

A Shameful Rout in the Land of the Kikones (9, 39-61)

Odysseus' relation of his voyage in the hall of Alkinoös follows a long-delayed but finally bold assertion of his identity, his parentage, his fame and his love of sunny Ithaka (9, 16-36). He explains that his journey had begun inauspiciously with a forced landing at Ismaros in the country of the Kikonians when "the wind took [him] and drove [him] ashore" (39). (We note here the hero's helpless passivity in the face of a superior force, namely a wind specified as an agent of change). With his companions Odysseus had then proceeded in full warrior style to sack, kill, loot, and finally, prepare for a strategic escape. His men, being of a different mind, set themselves to careless drinking and feasting on the beach, where they were set upon by Kikonians who summoned their compatriots from inland. "They came at early morning, like flowers in season / or leaves, and the luck that came our way from Zeus was evil", relates Odysseus (51f.). The reader of the *Iliad* will remember that, for the poet, trees and leaves, tree-felling and leaf-fall are equal signifiers of 'seasonal' death *and* the fall of man. The battle against the Kikones rages all day long, leaving many corpses and their leader grief-stricken by the time daylight deserts the field. This preparatory scene with its markedly 'solar' references to dawn and sunset contains the nub of an idea, namely that whilst the Sun is in the rising phase ("sacred daylight increasing", 56) the Greek party is likewise in the ascendant; defeat occurring only with the dying of the Sun, "at the time for unyoking the cattle", 58). Their fates, it seems, are already tied to the solar cycle.

Implicit too is the information that by reason of their foolishness, men who forget to behave correctly, slaughtering cattle and drinking excessively, are destined to lose their homecoming. The luck that came from Zeus was "evil". From the very first adventure the poet has introduced the theme of remembrance of one's duty and correct behaviour which will mark every successive episode in the series. More dreadful trials are to come, many brought about by a surfeit of violence and greed and that 'thoughtlessness' which will be enlarged into a thematic interplay of 'remembering and forgetting'. (The equally disastrous episode on the Cyclop's island is prefigured here in the land of the Kikones by the summoning of ferocious, like-minded relatives of the principals).

But the most unexpected outcome of the episode is the shameful rout of the previously undefeated hero of Troy, who has until now survived far greater conflicts than this little local skirmish. In effect, when Odysseus takes leave of his heroic *persona* and flees "death and destruction" he enters another world, quite literally, when the violent winds of Zeus strike the ship, creating a *supernatural* storm (*"epors' anemon",* 68) which we are told rips apart the ships' sails. After a brief respite, the winds and currents around Cape Maleia drive the ships on for another ten days until finally safe landfall is made in the country of the Lotus Eaters.

The exploits for which Odysseus is most renowned begin from this point. Whereas the Kikones had, in a minor episode, brought about the separation phase of the hero's initiation, successive events will advance the initiatory process via increasing isolation, disheartenment and degradation until the day when Odysseus will lie naked like a new-born on the shores of Scheria. The first storm to occur after departure from Troy has been the agent of separation and it will not be the last Odysseus will have to endure. Its importance must be based on the concept of the 'formless' quality of storm waters which cannot be controlled or contained. On the further side of this 'storm barrier' Odysseus is to be engaged for nearly ten hard years in the search for a corrective structure which might restore cosmic order to his universe.

So, this and later storms fulfil a structural purpose further laden with ideological references. In the words of Glenn Most (1989) they provide a "cordon sanitaire" around major episodes identified here as lying at ten distinct locations interrupted by the descent to Hades (eight if an exception is made for the islands of Circe and Kalypso, which do not belong to the circle but are to be found at exterior, but linked, locations). They are, in order of appearance, the following:

1) Lotus Eaters' land **2)** Cyclopes' islands **3)** Aiolia **4)** Laistrygonia;

(From Circe's island [to Hades] then back to Circe's island again)

5) Sirens' territory **6)** Skylla / Charybdis **7)** Thrinakia **8)** Skylla / Charybdis (again).

A final storm separates Odysseus from his raft after this second episode involving Skylla and Charybdis, and, ending the sequence of fearful trials, deposits him in a place which will eventually propel the hero towards re-integration with his own society: a journey which begins from the island of Kalypso, at or in the *omphalos* of the sea.

The episodes featuring the island of the Phaiakians and Ithaka itself remain 'outside the loop', yet they will be seen in a table set out on pages 142-143 to be balanced by the first two places named, Troy and the land of the Kikones.

The majority of previous attempts to codify the *Apologoi* have agreed on the centrality of the First Nekyia (visit to Hades), which establishes the journey to the Land of the Dead (beginning from Circe's island and returning there) as a fulcrum to the series and the centre point of the sequence. As for the remaining episodes, a circular journey has already been proposed for a variety of reasons by scholars Laurin Johnson (1999), Nano Marinatos (2001), Dmitri Nakassis (2004) and Florence and Kenneth Wood (2011), all of whom recognise an astronomical sub-stratum to the epic and to the Adventures in particular. Marinatos (2010) discusses the cosmic *axis*, centre, mountain, pillar, river and tree in her most recent analysis of Cretan iconography. It is here acknowledged that all are essentially correct in their basic assumptions and have made substantial contributions to an understanding of Homer's cosmology. There are many points on which we agree. But still to be addressed is the greatest challenge of all, to extend the cosmic references into meaningful contexts which establish a consistent pattern within the Adventures. Each episode is surely intended to contribute to the overriding cosmic theme; if it did not, the beautiful harmony and balance of the whole would fracture.

Quite simply, the solar path describes the greatest circle visible to man. It is moreover consonant with the arch of the sky and the curve of the horizon, as well as the cycle of life and seasons which returns to renewal at the place of beginning. The circle effectively encloses all that man can see and imagine from the central point of his own self, family and dwelling. This personal centre of being will also become a Centre in the mystical sense as man develops a sense of the spiritual dimension and

places it in real space, the sky. (The capitalisation here, of Centre, will serve to distinguish an ideal Centre from a lesser geographical centre). But it is time to move on, and to see where the travellers currently find themselves in respect of the journey we have defined as circular.

There is another alternating sequence within the structure of the Adventures which to my knowledge has never been commented upon. Remarkably, Homer's islands fluctuate in a regular manner between those which seem by design or default an *unbroken whole* and those forming a *'gateway'* (of paired cliffs, islands or promontories).

In the following list, '**I**' indicates wholeness; '**II**' indicates pairing or division:

The Lotus Eaters' land appears complete, a mainland location:

I

The Cyclopes' island is paired with Goat Island**:**

II

Aiolia is complete, "enclosed by a rampart of bronze" (10, 3f.):

I

Laistrygonia has a harbour which "a sky-towering / cliff encloses on either side" as well as two promontories (10, 87f.; 89f.):

II

Circe's island is surrounded by the endless sea, "all in a circle" (10, 195).

I

Nekyia

The Sirens sit in their meadow, behind the beach (12, 45):

I

Skylla and Charybdis are separate features, paired but antithetical:

II

Thrinakia has no adjacent counterpart:

I

Skylla and Charybdis feature for a second time, as paired features:

II

Kalypso's home is a cave in an unbroken island.

I

The sequence resolves into the pattern, thus:

I - II - I - II - I - Nekyia - I - II - I - II - I

Proceeding from this information, the ‘paired’ locations are viewed as cosmic gateways where men may pass, albeit with some difficulty; the undivided locations will be considered as ‘closed doors’. There is a precedent for this in that aspect of Egyptian eschatology we have already noted, which considers the west as the site of an open door admitting the souls of the dead and the east as a closed portal allowing egress but not entry. But here in the plan below (figure IX-15) which links the islands together in the style of a basic cosmogram, the ‘closed’ units fall into place on the cardinal directions north, south, east and west of the ecliptic, while the ‘open’ units which resolve into ‘windows of opportunity’ are found to lie on the intermediate points north-west, north-east, south-west and south-east, which also approximate to the solstice quarters. Surely this is beyond coincidence.

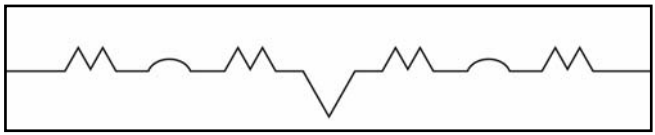

Figure IX-15

The sequence set out in a further table (below) gives a clear picture of the episodes in their ‘ring-like’ procession. Either side of the visit to Hades (Nekyia) lies a visit to Circe. After the first storm, four episodes precede the arrival on Circe’s island; another four episodes precede the arrival on Kalypso’s island. If the diagram were to be turned through 90 degrees so that the left hand edge is placed on the horizontal, this edge would become a base line, and a base line would correspond to the horizontal of the plane of the Earth and its seas. From its resulting profile the ‘island episodes’ can then be read as ‘islands’ proper and this is how they are shown in figure IX-15**.**

The Structured Course of the Adventures

Troy
Kikones
TWO DAY STORM
Lotus Eaters (S)
Cyclopes (SW)
Aiolia (W)
Laistrygones (NW)

Circe
NEKYIA
Circe

Sirens (N)
Skylla / Charybdis
Thrinakia (E)
Skylla / Charybdis (SE)

Kalypso

TWO DAY STORM
Phaiakians (N)
Ithaka

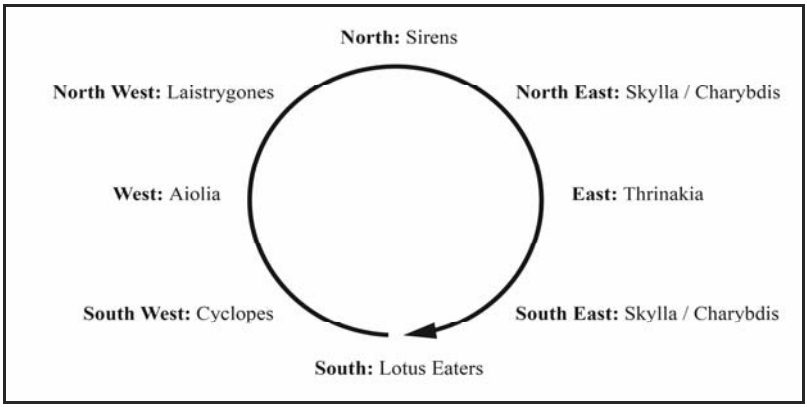

Figure IX-16

Placement of the 'open doors' at the solstice points, where the Sun seems to halt and linger before altering its course and turning back on itself, is altogether appropriate in terms of a mystical cosmology. In ancient tradition, the precious days when the doors seem to the observer to stand open for longer than usual are those when greater opportunities arise for the ascent and escape of the soul. Consequently the four cardinal points suggested here as the 'closed doors' at east, south, west and north are solar markers of very great importance; they play a role in stabilising contrarieties of memory and oblivion. The essential information is organised above in another format (figure IX-16) which picks up the circular, clockwise

course of the eight-part sequence, which begins and ends in the south, although finally the home of Kalypso will take over the southern terminus, but far deeper in space.

The doctrine concerning 'escape through the Sundoor' is as old as the *Rg Veda*.[8] A chimney or 'escape aperture' is physically built into the ancient Indian fire altar, which was numerically determined to meet an exacting symbolism involving an *axis* of the universe and the passage of smoke through three bricks with interior 'naves', just like axle-space within wheels, where each brick represents a plane of Earth, Air or Sky. The earliest *devas* (the gods) 'progressed' up and down these planes through this ceremonial chimney, and man as sacrificer aspired to travel up into the heavens by the same route. At each successive opening he is considered regenerated and reborn, while repeated deaths and rebirths lead to the point of liberation where he is "qualified to pass through the midst of the Sun."[9] The whole intention of the Vedic tradition, says Coomaraswamy, is to define the way to pass *through the Sun*, from mortality into immortality. That Sun is "the world door" that opens the Great lingers on the turn, or appears to do so; for three days it is hard to tell whether the Sun is rising or falling. A similar event occurs daily, at dawn and sunset, when day slips gradually into night and vice versa. Hence there are 'in-between' or liminal times every *day* which are replicated on a broader scale at the *yearly* solstices occurring in summer at the north-east, before the Sun's dawn appearances move with the fall of the season to the east, then finally to the winter solstice in the south-east before reversing direction (and again, the same in the western hemisphere, with night settings shifting from north-west, to west and south-west of the celestial sphere). But none is more potent in meaning than the place of the rising Sun in the north-east quarter of the ecliptic, at dawn on the summer solstice. Its importance in our ancient festivals is drawn from the occurrence of a rare moment when our Sun is highest and freshest at its dawn rebirth. And its tarrying at the solstice point creates a precious hiatus in time allowing, it is said, the soul to pass through the gate into the land beyond. The same applies to the twilight moment which Coomaraswamy describes as the timeless interval that intermediates between night and day.[10] An escape from the circle of existence is not merely an escape from spatial dimensions, but escape from the constraints of Time. We shall know once the hero Odysseus has encountered the timeless moment that he is close to freeing himself from the shackles of his mortal condition.

The relationship of time and space can be viewed in its universal application by study of a simple diagram which relates the two in a single Frame of Time, as conceived by De Santillana and von Dechend and referred to earlier.[11] Briefly, it is a matter of imagining a square plane defined by the four critical times of the solar year, two equinoxes and two solstices which approximate to the latitudes of the two Tropics and Equator. The four corners of this square plane are defined by the constellations rising heliacally at these times.

The lines of the Tropics indicate the highest and lowest points reached by the Sun, as viewed from Earth (solstices in July and December) and the equatorial parallel between them corresponds to the equinoctial days (in March and September). As well as these markers of the annual transits, the Frame of Time records the daily movement of the Sun, seen from the northern hemisphere to be rising in the east then arcing to the south before setting in the west. The corners of the Frame approximate to the intra-cardinal directions projected into space, but the Frame itself must be understood as a *vertical* structure (like an early weaving loom) recording solar 'movement up' and 'movement down' as well as 'movement across' (east to west).

It operates, of course, in a three dimensional world, a world which allows the magical islands visited by Odysseus and his crew to find a place at the major staging posts of the ecliptic circle.

For reasons later to be made clear, the islands of Circe and Kalypso are omitted from the scheme, since their homes and their functions are linked but separate. Our final task will be to find an appropriate position in the cosmogram for Scheria, Ithaka, and the respective homes of Circe and Kalypso. At that point traditions of the linear *axis* as a ladder or highway to the heavens will come into their own as markers of change relevant to the flight of the soul. Circe will be able to direct Odysseus to the Land of the Dead on a two-way ticket that brings him back to her island, but Kalypso directs her parting guest to a destination from which he will not return to her hospitable cavern (for such is the will of the gods and the law of the *axis*).

Now it is, as we have earlier indicated, a condition of the *axis* that movement along its length can only be *down* from height to centre and return to the height, whereas movement from the depth can pass through the centre and continue rising**.** This is precisely the pattern of the movements imposed upon Odysseus. He goes to the mouth of Hades but does not enter it as a living being; he must necessarily 'complete the circle' by travelling through the eastern hemisphere, and only then may he access the 'foot of the *axis*' which lies with Kalypso in the southern

cosmic sea, at the place where the god Hermes will convey the will of the divinity, namely that Odysseus be allowed to return. Despite the trials it imposes, this secondary, linear stage is more cogently aligned to 'a journey into life' than the previous circuit of solar space and time.

At this stage it will be helpful to see the fuller pattern which fits the linear part of the journey into the first, circular stage. It is a matter of adding the vertical polar axis to the circular plane of the Sun's path.

Axis and Solar Overlap

A figure earlier discussed (II-1) illustrates the three dimensions (and six directions) of the universe in which the *axis* provides the celestial north-south projection of the polar axis into space, towards a point which is not exclusively related to terrestrial direction, but bearing the potential to lead so far beyond that it can only be defined by the height of the Sun: the zenith, or perhaps even further into deeper space, *beyond* the Sun.

The figure shown as a Frontispiece now combines the Adventures and final locations with the Frame of Time, where compass directions are superimposed on both the ecliptic and the vertical *axis* which links zenith to nadir and beyond. The result contains a great deal of information which at this stage has only been partially covered. A brief résumé of the story follows:

The travellers 'lose their way' and are blown off course, *southward*; this much is apparent from precise locations of Troy and Cape Maleia, if one may in this instance trust the historical continuity of these names. At this point, following the storm, they leave the familiar landscapes of the Mediterranean basin to enter the circular path to which they will be bound until their death or their completion of the circle. The course of the Sun carries them along its clockwise route (here it will be remembered that 'clockwise' is identical to 'Sun-wise', since the earliest clocks were designed to mimic the Sun's path). They endure the dark and wintery phase of the sun's daily circling. But as the months progress, the circular daily movement of the Sun is lifting the travellers higher in the skies towards the summer solstice phase of the year. It is also lifting them nearer the Sun's highest point, the zenith, which during the summer season will be the highest of all on the Tropic of Cancer. This is the time when it will be possible for all the ship's crew to exit the circle and make connection with the high *axis* point which gives access to other worlds. It is to be found on the island of Circe, where so many are to come to grief. As we know, Odysseus' ship sails thereafter to the mouth of Hades, but returns to Circe, travelling first 'down' then 'up' the *axis,* to and from the *omphalo*s-

centre of the Earth, and the journey resumes under the directions of the sorceress, who is able to forewarn of the dangers lying in the eastern half of the circle. (This half takes up the story again, at the northern point of the ecliptic where the Sirens lie in wait). Now they journey along the falling winter phase of the Sun to its low point at the dawn of the midwinter solstice. Following his final adventure in the south-east, Odysseus is to be transported by a violent storm to the house of Kalypso, who, with the authority of the divine messenger Hermes as her inspiration, is in the right place to grant him safe journey, *upwards*, along the *axis* to Scheria the idyllic island in the skies above the Earth. From there he is transported effortlessly to his home island of Ithaka, which is to be found at the true centre of the sky.

Circe and Kalypso are the respective guardians of the upper and lower ends of the *axis* and controllers of movement along it.

Ithaka is the centre of Odysseus' world, his final destination and also the hub of the circle, placed here in the frontispiece diagram as the centre point of axis and cosmos. As a result of his courage, his intelligence and his 'remembering', he succeeds in circumnavigating the circle, but by then he will be quite alone. Scheria lies either at the noon day summer zenith of the Sun or perhaps even further beyond, since the *axis* penetrates the highest levels of the sky. Ithaka on the other hand seems a candidate for an ideological Centre, even though like all other 'islands' it is presented as a physical centre. The west wind which blew the ships from Aiolia (in the west) to within sight of the hero's homeland, and the east wind which drove the mariners back to Aiolia after the disaster with the bag of winds (10, 19-27) establish Ithaka as an unspecified point on an east-west trajectory. Identifying Ithaka as a cosmic location will be the final challenge on which the validity of the whole series must be confirmed.

All these questions will be elaborated in coming pages, episode by episode.

The first major event of the cycle is conducted in the lethargic land often identified with Egypt, where myriad lotuses bloom in fact, as well as in symbol. It is the first of the eight stations on the ecliptic.

The Lotus Eaters: Dreamers in the South (9, 82-104)

Blown off course as they rounded Cape Maleia and Kythera, the sailors are thankful to make landfall in the country of the Lotus Eaters who offer no threat at all, in fact quite the opposite: they share their gastronomic pleasures with the rough and ready mariners cast on their shores. One taste of the honey-sweet fruits and the envoys with their herald lose all sense of

purpose; they even "forget the way home" (97), which in the context of Odysseus' *nostos*, his drive to return, marks this country as an antithesis of Ithaka, the longed-for land which is never far from the hero's thoughts. People have indeed been known to chew narcotic seeds in the lands of North Africa and, it is said by experts in pharmacology, still do to this day for the tranquillising effect of the lotus seed.[12]

'To Forget is to Lose One's Homecoming'

Confirmation that these are truly a southern people will arise once their counterparts in the north, the dreadful Sirens, have been shown for the purveyors of a seductive form of wisdom which draws many a sailor to his death. For in the latent symbolism of this 'land of dreams', the Lotus Eaters represent 'forgetting', as opposed to 'knowing' or 'remembering'. Their metaphysically opposite roles are expressed in what one must call (for lack of a better term) an esoteric geography. So, what exactly is meant by 'forgetting'? Morally, it does not appear too grave a sin, but mystically it must be read as 'failure to know or remember something (of great importance)'. Such forgetfulness displayed by his men (but not of course by Odysseus) marks them as beings destined never to complete this spiritual journey.

This is an appropriate moment to establish the wider context of a theme which will prove to have a profound bearing on the shaping of the hero's journey and its resolution.

'Forgetting' is the equivalent of sleep and the loss of 'Self'. The latter is capitalised here to distinguish it from the mundane, for Self is of a far higher order than 'oneself': it is the soul-vehicle which, properly directed, may carry man to eternity. It is the part of us shared with the universal creation that has to be freed from our mundane delusions and attachments in order that we may find our way to true Being. All else is death. Mircea Eliade writes of this philosophy as a pan-Indian motif expressing the fall of the spirit into the binding, chaining circle of existence which keeps man from reaching his god.[13] To 'remember', or 'to awaken' is the first necessary step towards gaining that knowledge which grants immortality; to sleep, on the other hand, and to forget, is to die and fall back into mortality. This was the fate of those wretched companions who 'forgot' their master's wise counsels. They ate the Lotus seeds, untied the bag of winds and consumed the Cattle of the Sun; so there was to be no homecoming for them, only swallowing by monsters or by the deep cosmic ocean. As Plato was to say in his *Phaedrus* (250), the perfect do not need to 'remember': they never forget the truth once seen.

From Hesiod we learn of the omniscience of Memory, mother of the Muses, who knows the past and the future.[14] It is her recollection of beginnings or origins, *'ex arches'*, including the birth of the cosmos and genealogies that Homer, like Hesiod, will call upon for an inspiration which is on a par with divine knowledge. The reality he will seek is as old or even older than the cosmos, because it includes the primordial action of the Creator.

In the Greek world forgetfulness is the fate of those who descend to Hades and make the gloomy crossing of the river Lethe. Only the exceptional dead like Teiresias still have a memory once they leave the shores of the living. The picture will change however when Orphic philosophies concerning the transmigration of souls eventually reveal their penetration of Greek culture. From the epigraphic evidence of engraved tablets found among the dead[15] we learn how former personal lives may be 'forgotten' by those who 'remember' to avoid the fountain of Lethe and drink instead from the Lake of Memory.[16] Northern Europe preserves a similar and possibly derivative tradition with legends of the great god Odin, who underwent a trial of extreme self-sacrifice (i.e. sacrifice of 'Self') and earned the gift of knowledge from the well of Mimir, 'Memory', which lay at the foot of the Scandinavian Tree of Life, Yggdrasil, although he had to cast an eye into the waters in return for the gift.[17] Perhaps it was the 'distorting eye' attaching him to this world which he exchanged for the eye of 'true vision', or perhaps, like poor blinded Polyphemos, the loss of his eye may be understood as the penetration of an *omphalos* by the *axis*, and all that this implies in terms of solar symbolism.

For Homer, Sleep is the brother of Death[18] and for Hesiod, Sleep and Death are the companions of Night who resides in the depths of Hades or Tartarus.[19] Wherever Hades, Tartarus or for that matter Styx may lie, common sense suggests 'below', 'under', or 'south' (of an upper world of life and light). The Lotophagoi justly merit placement in this southern quarter, the direction of death, for their idleness marks them as indifferent to the desire to 'rise above' which is the instinct of spiritual man. Death is to be discovered, too, in the north or upper skies: the direction of power in the shamanic scheme of things. North from the Lotophagoi lies the home island of the death-dealing Sirens who seduce their victims with knowledge of "everything that happens" (12, 191). Needless to say, that is the wrong kind of knowledge. It leads to death for the listener, not enlightenment, and is no more use than the Lotus Eaters' evasion of reality.

There will be more to say when addressing those marked locations where the hero avoids or permits disaster by his physical (meaning 'spiritual') absence from the scene. Nor will it be overlooked that the fall of the soul into matter, whether by sleeping or forgetting, presupposes a point of origin outside the terrestrial: a 'universal soul' formulated long before Plato.

Polyphemos the Cyclops
(South-west quarter, Winter Solstice: 9, 105-566)

The death-signs are strong in this westerly quarter where the Sun is in descending mode at the end of the day, as well as passing through its months of winter solstice at the end of the year. As the Cyclops' island is partnered by Goat Island, with (as it proves) a dangerous narrow channel between, then the islands form shadow-doublets of Skylla (tall or high, penetrated by a cave) and her companion Charybdis, another dangerous female (she is another 'swallower') but blessed by a Tree of Life in the form of a fig tree by which Odysseus will be delivered. At first encounter these two lie to the north-east of the circle, hence diametrically opposite the Cyclopean islands. The two locations (south-west and north-east) are thematically bound by caves, swallowers, stomachs and a stake, tree or pillar which acts as an *axis mundi.*

The Blinding

An *axis* symbol in the form of a tree-mast is the agent of the tragic blinding of Polyphemos as he lies sated by his cannibalistic feast and the potent wine of Maron (9, 371-400). Odysseus' raising of the great and sacred timber (since it is, oddly, cut from the gnarled and twisted olive tree dedicated to Athene) results in the penetration of a single eye and the defeat of an evil, antisocial monster, another eater of men. If the timber is an *axis,* as seems likely, then the eye (which has to be singular if this is indeed an *axis*) must represent that penetration of the Earth at an *omphalos* which is the key to the establishment of order in our world, its 'right-running'. A good man aided by "some great divinity", as in this instance (381) is able to move the massive timber, even though he is puny in stature by comparison; in such hands the power of the *axis* to act for good is tantamount and the evil of the monster is nullified.

Like the olive tree of Ithaka in the bedchamber of Odysseus, the green wood has been shaped to a purpose. Its very green-ness makes one wonder how the stake can glow, almost catching fire, "terribly incandescent"

(diaphaino)[20] as the author tells us (378f.). From this point references to fire which have been accumulating since the sailors first entered the cave erupt into one of the most violent descriptions of heat and pain known in the Epics. The spinning, twirling, biting of the fire-hardened timber causes the eye to boil, blast, scorch, burn, crackle and sizzle most horribly (387-394). The onomatopoeic language of the similes and metaphors of this episode introduce the work of carpenters or blacksmiths, but there are far more than manual skills involved, for in this instance 'the raising of the beam' is the act of a hero-adventurer actively engaged in combating the powers of evil ('spiritual death') represented by Polyphemos and his neighbours. Odysseus sets the beam upright, restores the power of the *axis* and potentially, the right-running of the world.

The Elixir

The precise origins and folkloric components of the tale have long preoccupied Homer's commentators. In spite of the number and complexity of their conclusions, yet another influence is proposed here on the basis of a number of significant objects common to both the Homeric episode and a well-known Hindu cosmogonic legend. Taken all together, the numerous players (Cyclopes and sailor-companions, 'opposing teams'), and several objects (milk and cheese in abundance, sheeps' ordure, magical wine, and a rotating pole) correspond with striking precision to the ingredients of one of the most ancient Hindu myths, the 'Churning of the Ocean of Milk', *Samudramathana*.[21] It is a myth of Creation which describes the recovery of a jar of elixir or ambrosia (*amrita*, food of immortality) from the bottom of the ocean by the use of a churning stick turned one way then another, as a dairymaid would churn butter in a pail. Vishnu advises the *devas* (gods) to call the *asura*-demons to help churn the bottom of the ocean. He promises they will see ambrosia, jewels and many other splendid gifts rise from the floor of the Ocean of Milk when they turn a mighty rotating pole, for which they (being very great powers) employ the inverted mountain, Mandara. The belt that drives this equivalent of the ancient fire-drill, or butter churner, or brace-and-bit, is the king of the snakes. *Devas* and *asuras* pull the snake back and forth while Vishnu leans on this churning stick, just as Odysseus leans on the rotating tree-stake in the socket of the Cyclops' eye. Many objects arise, followed by a 'poison' which conceals the ambrosia proper. The black wine given to Polyphemos and consumed in the manure-stained, 'poisoned' cave full of milk pails is a close equivalent to the elixir of the ancient myth (it even comes from "where ambrosia and nectar flow in abundance", watered by rain sent by Zeus,

358f.), while fire and foam surround the Hindu churning stick just as they bubble around Polyphemos' eye.

Coincidences perhaps, but an Indic origin for the Greek story (which could once have had pan-Indo-European currency) would support the argument that Homer's monsters, trees, mountains and even human characters are players in a celestial drama wherein the familiar *axis* rules. It also confirms the metaphysical aspect of the mythic cosmology of both the *Odyssey* and the *Mahabharata*, the oldest surviving source of the Indian tale, for this is not cosmology as science, but cosmology as a template for spiritual life. The modern reader is much diverted by mountains as trees, trees as mountains, and probably perplexed by the confusion of things not being what they seem to be, but it matters little, since the principle and function are identical for each and can even extend to masts and spars and timbers of the broken ship. As for the witty pun on Odysseus' pseudonym, *outis*, 'Nobody', which makes the hero into a non-existent shadow of a man, this too is in harmony with initiation procedures proposing the negation of Self as an essential early stage in the soul's advancement towards a new identity with the Creator.

Polyphemos is an essentially primitive, uncultured man in whom the laws of society count for little. Any creature that eats others of his kind (as do the Cyclops and Laistrygones) places himself in the same monstrous category as the greedy suitors and Skylla and Charybdis, all inhuman 'swallowers'. The poet is however too subtle to present us with a black-and-white model of extreme barbarism. Polyphemos is in his way an orderly being. He has neighbours, but no community. He may, like all his kind, neglect the potential for shipbuilding offered by the excellent harbour, and the fertile land lying round about attracts little interest from him or his fellows, but the great monster maintains a fine degree of order in his own centre, his cave. There, lambs and kids are as carefully penned by age in appropriate groups, and the billy goats and rams live separately outside in a well-fenced yard, in keeping with the very model of order presented by another skilled livestock keeper, the saintly Eumaios in his enclosed piggery. The overflowing pails and baskets heavy with cheeses are testament to the industry of the shepherd who shows a touching degree of sympathy for the animals in his care, resembling not only Ithakan Eumaios but Helios, too, who keeps his sacred cattle in controlled, unchanging numbers. There is good and bad in Polyphemos, and this presents a considerable challenge to any scholar hoping to classify this most memorably folkloric character in terms of the overall themes of the *Odyssey*. He has technical skill, but little intelligence; he has acquired a sense of order but has never created an organised community capable of

imposing higher values or maintaining tradition (or 'tribal memory'). In their unfocused and idiosyncratic way, the Cyclopes have turned their backs on memory, commitment and responsibility, as surely as have the idling Lotus Eaters. Hence their major function would seem to be a negative one, to provide a contrasting picture of brute ignorance to the intelligent purpose of another man of great cunning whose sleep-laden forgetting is of brief duration. Whilst the Cyclops has no desire to know, to change, to move on, or to improve his community, his enemy Odysseus is driven to rediscover and re-establish in his own centre, Ithaka, the social order which reflects the greater cosmic paradigm. Aptly blinded in his ignorance Polyphemos stands at no more than a single evolutionary step beyond the south-dwelling Lotus Eaters in their well of forgetting. But as we have seen he does inhabit an orderly, if malodorous, cave and possesses a vital piece of mast-timber (for which he has no apparent use, not being a sea-going type) and as such, he, his mast timber and his cave prefigure the meeting of *axis* and *omphalos* on which the whole series of Adventures is predicated. This Cyclops illustrates all potential, but negligible achievement; all that is required of him is to raise that neglected timber, thereby re-creating the cosmic model.

The key terms here (and they will recur in future pages, if not already in use) are symbolic penetration, Sun's eye / sun door, threshold guardian, and self-divestiture. By this stage the solar context of an ecliptic journey is beginning to make itself felt.

Boulders and Rocks

Had Odysseus the muscular strength to match his cunning and intelligence, he might have been able to roll aside the mighty boulder which kept the men imprisoned in the cave. This "huge door stop" or "piece of sky-towering cliff" (9, 241, 243) would defeat the power of twenty-two wagons to move it from its place in the "gateway" of the cave, says the poet. It is built on a cosmic scale suggestive of the stone that traditionally blocks the aperture above the abyss, the *omphalos* of the world; it may even be the 'White Rock' encountered on the road to Hades. No easy escape lies here for the hero and his companions, but through the exercise of their intelligence the crew and their captain do finally navigate the narrow channel between the Cyclopes' Island and Goat Island, despite the rocks hurled at them by the giant in his rage. These rocks (one is "the peak of a great mountain" (481) surely another borrowing from the Churning of the Ocean myth?) are, in narrative terms, aimed to kill the escaping sailors but also, by implication, intended to close the gap

between the paired land masses, with the intention of closing the cosmic gateway to immortality as surely as the Planktai cut off the passage of ships, or the petrifaction of the Phaiakian ship prevented any future sailor from proceeding beyond Scheria ever again. Here is the first instance of the 'clashing gates' motif which the poet will introduce in the two Skylla and Charybdis episodes, the first of which is placed in this programme at the north-easterly quarter diagonally opposite the Cyclops' south-westerly island.

In his victory over the cannibalistic Cyclops in the west, Odysseus has apparently avoided the sunset darkness which can carry a man down into Hades. An exceptional being, he is to follow the solar path into deeper and darker cosmic waters until he will be ready to emerge close to the point where the circular journey began, in the east and south. He still has to negotiate with the King of the Winds and escape from the confining harbour of the Laistrygones, which like the Cyclops' land consists of another gateway of death to man.

Aiolia, Kingdom of the King Aiolos (West; equinoctial: 10, 1-76).

Here is another king who enjoys the love of the gods. His island is circled by a great wall of bronze and his citadel encloses handsome, well-ordered houses rising above a sheer wall of sea cliff. For all its solidity this is a floating island, but 'floating' does not mean inconstancy or erratic change. Order is a key note here, with six sons tucked tidily beside six daughters in their corded beds in separate rooms.

There are several good solar reasons for placing Aiolia in the west and on the equatorial plane where the equinoctial Sun will briefly align its path to the Earth's equator. On such days in Spring and Autumn, the world can be imagined as enjoying total balance, and all the more so considering the mildness of the climate in those seasons, balanced between the exciting potential of springtime resurgence and autumnal abundance. These are 'Elysian' conditions. No wonder, therefore, that Aiolos maintains such a comfortable and equable household of matched "sons and daughters" (nights and days? summer and winter?) and that Thrinakia, its eastern counterpart which must be affiliated to the dawn, is so rich in cattle associated with the Sun.

The brazen wall surrounding the Aiolian kingdom suggests the reflected gold of sunset, and the round solidity of the floating ('mobile', 'unfixed') island is appropriate to the Sun in its descent below the horizon at evening. It is the 'changeable', or 'changing' island, as the name of the

land, its divagations and its king make clear.[22] That its instability is a consequence of its subjection to the contrary, shifting winds may be assumed, but may equally be read into the west as the point where change must occur and not necessarily for the better. The same winds seem to blow through the palace where the six sons and six daughters enter from the rooms where they keep to their orderly beds, to converge in the hall of the king and his wife. With no mention of children from the incestuous pairing of sons with daughters on the Island of the Winds, bound by its high brazen wall, the emergent sense is of a rigidly confined and unchanging social order, without future, despite the mobility of the whole. Social markers which convert, in Homeric terms, to correct conduct include feasting in familial harmony, the presentation of appropriate guest gifts, the presence of pillars, and a fine threshold to be respected by guests (as it is by Odysseus). The Aiolian household has the potential to be another Spartan or Scherian palace, where the inhabitants are "close to the gods" or godlike in their form and manners, but at this stage in his journey Odysseus is not sufficiently mature to control his men or his own fate. Aiolia presents an opportunity wasted; a literal reversal of fortune which first offers then denies salvation.

As noted, Aiolia falls into place opposite easterly Thrinakia, island of the Cattle of the Sun and the 'sunrise' phase of the solar transit. It belongs to the death side, the west, *zophos*, where the road to Hades takes its beginnings as the Sun descends into obscurity: "Hades drew the lot of the mists and the darkness" (*Iliad* 15, 191). This pairing is reinforced by numerical symbolism common to both, which may well have an underlying calendrical meaning in each case.

An Indic Aiolos: Varuna

Looking further afield into cultural affinities, in Indic tradition a pairing of the gods Mitra and Varuna casts the rising and setting Suns as a pair of brothers who are contrary but complementary in their functioning as "powerful and sublime masters of the sky".[23] Varuna, the 'sunset god', is the one who sustains the cosmic order with his breath as the wind, his all-seeing thousand eyes which miss nothing, and above all, his magical affinity with knots and cords.[24] He 'binds and imprisons' the sinner who falls into his toils. Once he was the supreme sky god, but at some stage Varuna was demoted to become guardian of the west, where he remains to this day in the Hindu pantheon of gods and their cardinal stations. In addition to his Ouranian aspect (the possibly related etymology of Varuna / Ouranos is debatable but worth consideration, since both refer to 'great

waters') Varuna has a distinct nocturnal aspect as a god of darkness.[25] For the Greeks, the west wind, hence the west *per se,* was Zephyrus, meaning the dark. And Varuna, like Aiolos, was of dark and uncertain temper.

Although Homer's Aiolos shares some important features with Varuna and similar binding gods in the ancient Near East, no positive identification can be made. It could be more useful to consider the magical value of knots such as those employed in fastening the bag of winds. Eliade discusses the ancient use of such knots, cords, and snares in medicine and sorcery and describes how some are intended to cure or assist and others to constrain and punish.[26] The deeper symbolism of cords derives largely from the cosmic imagery of weaving and spinning (of life, of fate, of cosmic order) which is as well known in Greek mythology as it is in traditional societies around the world. The *axis*, like Zeus' golden chain, is a form of cord that unites the upper and lower worlds, tying them together but also causing each to support the other on the framework of time and place, where the horizontals of three planes of Heaven, Earth and Underworld provide the horizontal weft to the lengthwise, axial warp. In early Indian thought, the cord or thread which binds the worlds is the 'breath' of the Creator, which brings us back to the symbolism of Sun, wind and air: "yonder Sun strings these worlds to himself on a thread…Now that thread is a gale…"[27]

It is with a cord like the clew of Ariadne that man disentangles himself from the labyrinthine coils of this world. Thus it is not too great a leap to suggest that 'to lose (or equally, 'loose') the cord' is the equivalent of 'to lose the way', for thus it proves for the travellers who neglect the advice of their master to leave the bag of winds intact.

The Bag of Winds as an *Omphalos*

These are the fundamental ideas required to unravel the true meaning of the episode. Fortunately we shall not need to find that famed but long-dead cobbler who is said to have stitched the oxhide bag together, since this is no tangible artefact. Aiolos has presented Odysseus and his companions with the magical means to escape from the constricting circle of existence, namely a bag of prime oxhide nine years of age where all the winds are tightly contained by a silver cord. Until the time of departure (10, 25) the bag contained "the courses of all the blowing / winds" (20f.) but of course the captain must have one wind to blow him on his way. So he is granted the West Wind. From these details it can be inferred that Ithaka lies to the east of Aiolia, in the direction of the World's Centre defined by the crossing of *axis* and equator, or possibly even upon it.

Number information (i.e. concerning the winds, the adult offspring, the "nine-year ox", the "whole month" of entertainment for the visitors) allied to the use of precious metals (bronze, silver, gold) must always alert the listener or reader to an esoteric sense contained within a mundane but exotic exterior. Numbers are implicitly sacred (they mean 'order') and the rarer and purer the metal, the closer it comes to exemplifying perfection. What Aiolos has initially granted is an *omphalos* form in which all the directions (though ultimately, all but one) are contained. Were it not for the 'missing wind' which is essential to the narrative the oxhide bag would form a perfect image of the mystic Centre, where all directions are held at that invisible point where potentiality may unfold into manifestation.[28] The meaning of the prohibition against untying the cord is that the potentiality in question must be held firm: to release the homologisation of multiple directions is to destroy the unifying bond of the universe, with resultant chaos which creates a centrifugal disruption of order. The immediate effect of untying the silver cord, we are told by the narrative, is a 'bursting' of the winds, the onset of an "evil blast of the stormwind" (47, 54) which disrupts the course the men had set for their own country. Moreover, the bag of winds was potentially the instrument of Odysseus' return to his own point of origin and focus of desire, the island of Ithaka, which lies so close. But by sleeping (31) and 'forgetting' while his companions sate their greed for gold, Odysseus' return is snatched from him by the release of all the winds at once, which creates the second great storm wind and prefigures another storm to come, the storm which follows the sailors' departure from Thrinakia, the easterly counterpart to Aiolia. The conflicting winds escaping from the bag create chaotic disorder where previously they were held suspended in harmonious balance (a characteristic of the Centre). This closed island may have seemed to be an island of opportunity, but without a doorway, however perilous, there was never going to be a means of escape.

Laistrygones of the North-West (Summer Solstice: 10, 80-132)

Coming between Aiolia with its westerly features and the deadly Sirens whose home approximates to the north, Laistrygonia is a suitable candidate for the north-west solar position. This being so, the "Far Gate" (or a far-off gate) or "Telepylos" (10, 82), can be none other than the solstice gateway of the summer afternoon. In solar terms, nothing could be 'further' than the Sun's midsummer height at the zenith. At that special point, at that time of day, the Sun begins its daily descent towards night in

the west, where it will fall below the horizon into darkness. But since the Sun is briefly poised between the two and high in the sky during the turning point of the summer season, it presents the perfect image of a point of exit into the cosmic sea that lies beyond. If the home of the gods is as one would expect in the highest firmament (north, or zenith, or far above these points) then those locations like Telepylos that constitute solar gateways are well fitted to open the way to the passage of man or god. It is all too clear from the disaster in the land of the Laistrygonians just what may happen to the ordinary traveller who strays incautiously through the high promontories into their eerie harbour: he will meet the same fate as the sailors who fled in their ships from the cave of Polyphemos, namely 'death by boulder', or for those who never left, cannibalistic consumption. In other words, their demise will entail burial in or under a stone or ingestion via a stomach or cave. Both convey the downward path into oblivion.

A Solar Gate

The greatest challenge lies in decoding those five lines which describe an enigmatic encounter between a herdsman and a shepherd at the gates of the citadel called "Lamos, Telepylos of the Laistrygones".

> …"one herdsman, driving
> his flocks in hails another, who answers as he drives
> his flocks out; and there a man who could do without sleep could earn
> double wages, one for herding the cattle, one for the silvery
> sheep. There the courses of night and day lie close together." 10, 82-86.

Much academic time and thought has been expended in trying to extract a geographical solution from these confusing lines. The majority propose an Arctic location for the territory on the basis of a six-month summer, but this does not make a great deal of sense within any consistent overall pattern of the journey as narrated. If Laistrygonia is not to be placed in terrestrial geography, as in the 'Arctic' solution, but imagined as a point in celestial space, it will be necessary to establish whether we are we dealing predominantly with a time, a place, or combination of the two.

It is hard to ignore the strong correspondence between Hesiod's place "where Night and Day draw near and greet one another as they pass the great threshold of bronze",[29] and the greeting passed between Homer's oxherd and shepherd in this adventure of Odysseus'. This may be a literary trope with which the audience was familiar, since it is found in much the same form in Parmenides' introduction to his poetic description of a soul

journey by chariot through the dark heavens. In his *Proem*, Parmenides describes passing through a great gate of the paths of night and day which is guarded by a female figure, 'Justice', whose task is to validate the worth of the traveller, make judgment, and then either allow him to proceed on his way, or deny him. Later in the main body of the poem Parmenides endows Justice with the role of 'upholder of stability and constancy'. Therefore Justice holds fast to the "fetters" (are these the bolts of the gate which she defends?) and does not allow it (i.e. 'Nothing') "to come into being or to perish". In short, she maintains perfect balance and order (also the necessary conditions of justice) at this junction point of day and night. [30] As a portal guardian, Parmenides' figure of Justice appears charged with the responsibility of keeping the 'world beyond' separate from the 'world before' the gates, her especial duty being to protect and retain the creative power of that substance lying 'beyond'.

Equinox and Equator

In an earlier chapter it was proposed that the gates of Homer, Hesiod and Parmenides could be understood in the context of an eschatological passage of some rarity in Pindar's *Olympian II*. Pindar's 'good' men (neither sinners nor saints but men of median character) are allocated a heavenly kingdom where they enjoy "equal nights and days" (61f.), by which we may suppose they live at an equinoctial point. Now, from our knowledge of the Homeric universe, we know that high Olympos is blessed by constantly fine and light weather, in stark contrast to the endless gloom of Hades and Tartarus; so in this respect, an equatorial time or place would be entirely appropriate to the in-between placement of the second group, merely 'good'. We are forced to the conclusion that equatorial day and night length is in some general manner a means of defining one of the three planes of Earth, and the quality of life enjoyed there. Hesiod's gate at "the ends and springs of misty Tartarus"[31] must be the gate of the lower plane, where night and day pass in the dark days of winter, while the gates of Pindar and Parmenides are evidently equatorial. If the purpose of the traveller is to pass (willingly or unwillingly, in the case of entry into the Underworld) through the gate, this raises the question of what lies beyond. If the gate is a solar portal, the traveller must be aiming to pass to the Sun or beyond the Sun into deeper, unknown space.

Sleepless Days

Now perhaps we are ready for the Laistrygonian community. They are far from saintly in their conduct; in fact they have a great deal in common with Cyclopes such as Polyphemos; they have the same cannibalistic habits and the same predilection for throwing boulders at unwanted guests. Yet they apparently enjoy a measure of clear light (judging from the all-round visibility of the land's features, and the length of the working day) even if this is not as constant as the brilliance of Olympos. At no time does Homer speak in this passage of an absence of darkness, only an ability of a countryman to go without sleep, which is not at all the same thing.

A long day such as that enjoyed at summer solstice is perfectly feasible in the immediate context. At the (June) solstice, daylight lasts in the northern hemisphere for approximately eighteen hours (i.e. 4 am. to 10pm.). The night endures for only six hours. With such a long summer day, the farmer can be out and about for at least twice as long as in December, a month which gives only eight hours of daylight at the winter solstice. In theory at least he could do the work of two men in the time available to him (i.e. two nine-hour shifts) without the interval of sleep which usually comes between one day's work and another. To 'do without sleep' (10, 84) would be a matter of enduring up to eighteen hours of unbroken labour. No wonder the poet remarks upon such a proviso - it is a near impossibility. As for the 'closeness' of night and day of which Homer speaks in line 86, this is indicative of afternoon at the north-western solstice point where (and when) the Sun has passed its northern zenith at midday and is about to 'fall into' night. It is impossible to tell by naked eye the moment when the Sun ceases to rise and begins to fall; we are all aware that it happens but the two moments are too close to distinguish one from the other. It is another instance when time appears to stand still. In summary, the meeting of the two herdsmen is all that is needed to mark Laistrygonia as a solstice kingdom.

The evidence points to a summer solstice in the north (or rather, 'up') from the line of the equator which corresponds to the seasons of the equinoxes. The threshold of the gates of Telepylos then becomes the northern partner of Hesiod's winter solstice portal, those other solar gates lying deep in Tartarus. And because night and day (or at least, their 'courses') are running close together, it is to be assumed that the episode is chronologically programmed to an approaching nightfall. Or, indeed, it may be nightfall itself. It is a common misconception that the Sun always sets in the due west as if lying on an equator linked to the horizon, for at the height of summer the Sun is setting at the north-western point, when

the tilt of its daily orbit brings it into a space we define as the Tropic of Cancer. (It rises at the north-east and sets in the north-west, after a southerly arc high in the summer sky). The reverse is of course true during the winter days when the ecliptic describes a low arc from south-east to south-west.

Here is a narrative interpretation which does not clash with the allocation of cosmic gates at other cardinal points on the Circle of Time, neither as we have it from the other authors named here nor as they fall into their sequential places in the proposed scheme.

Harbour and City

The controversial passage concerning working hours of shepherd and herdsman is followed by a physical description of the Laistrygonian citadel (87-90) which is not without cosmic reference, only this time the 'gate motif' is somewhat disguised. The harbour is "glorious" - perhaps glorious beyond the skill of man alone? and is flanked by 'sky-towering cliffs' which define and / or enclose it. There is some ambiguity here, in that the harbour also has two promontories which run out towards the mouth, facing each other. Whatever the intention, the poet has described an enclosed place with a narrow entrance flanked by promontories and high cliffs which is not so very far removed from the clashing rocks of the Planktai or the Cyclops' Island close to Goat Island, particularly in respect of the sense of entrapment which soon unfolds in the following lines. The high cliffs reaching up to the sky (like the pine tree on Kalypso's island) and the smoke rising from countryside, like smoke seen rising from Circe's homestead, are axial in implication; whilst the 'cavernous' harbour is an *omphalos* of the most deadly kind, giving passage into the lower regions alone for those of the companions ("like fish", 124) who are struck down by the spears and stones of the inhabitants. (Note that the spear pierces the *omphalos*-harbour just as the stake pierced the eye of Polyphemos). The harbour appears at first as a place of great calm with its unruffled sea, but then so did the cave of the Cyclops, where Odysseus and his men initially found shelter and abundant food and drink, only to fall prey soon after to the ravenous appetite of the giant. The island of Aiolos was at first a friendly place, but that condition did not hold. It was from a high point too, that Odysseus looked down on the house of Circe, lying tranquilly in its hollow and sending up innocent smoke, just as does the country of the Laistrygones which Odysseus now views from his cliff-top vantage point. Mountain with cave, harbour, domestic *oikos* or underground cavern, each and every one interprets the *omphalos* or potentially

dangerous point of 'becoming', that is, 'falling down' into death, or its happier reverse, 'passing up' into life. In each instance, Odysseus may either pass safely through these omphalic gateways, or not; so far he has failed to progress very far, but neither has he met the fate of his less fortunate companions who possess neither his wiliness nor his close acquaintance with the "many ways". He is still alive, and still dreaming of Ithaka.

Royal Families

Odysseus will find the guidance he needs from the girl drawing water from the wellspring in front of the town (105-111). The daughter of the king, Antiphates, with whom she shares a "high-roofed" (111) and "glorious" (112) house, she is a doublet of Nausikaa, who will guide Odysseus to the high-roofed house of *her* father on Scheria. On Ithaka, he will have the advice of Athene herself at another more familiar landing, in the bay of Phorkys. But the princess of the Laistrygonians, for all her initial helpfulness, belongs to a race of violent man-eaters. Subsequent events reveal that Telepylos does not present a desirable door of opportunity, but the opposite, a door to death, and the princess belongs to a category of rapacious, confining guardians, who will do all in their power to delay or subvert the progress of Odysseus and his men. The efforts of such malicious 'keepers of the gate' met so far, such as Polyphemos, Aiolos, and the king and queen of Laistrygonia may seem brutal, but theirs is a necessary role in the process of evaluation and judgment which eliminates all but the most worthy. In this respect, they are the sisters of Parmenides' Justice, who also keeps the gate.

From their harrowing experience in the land of the Laistrygones the captain and crew sail onwards, lamenting their lost companions but blithely unaware of the great trials still awaiting them. They are soon to step off the great ecliptic circle which has until now held them to their course.

CHAPTER TEN

HADES IN THE FIRST AND SECOND NEKYIA

To Circe and Back

Before he can engage with the second half of his journey, Odysseus must find his way to the island of Circe where he will witness the bestial changes that strike his companions. Such an evil enchantment as this debasement worked by Circe amounts to a form of death, a de-naturing death of the outer self. Death is to become an even greater preoccupation than ever before as the number of Odysseus' faithful companions is gradually reduced. In spite of his sword-wielding superior strength that nullifies the power of Circe's wand and the masculine charm that wins him access to her bed, Circe's palace becomes a 'falling into death' for at least one of the witch's guests.

The sorry tale of poor Elpenor would be a farcical episode were it not that it serves a thematic function in underlining Circe's halls as a place of descent. Earlier, it was remarked how Circe represents the 'down' path of the *axis*. Now we have a drunken Elpenor fuddled by sleep and falling off the roof of her palace (10, 551-560). He had gone up by means of a long ladder, but in his confusion he missed his footing, broke his neck and fell down to Hades, where Odysseus later found him (11, 51-83). The young man begs for a proper burial, a grave mound and an oar planted as a marker. The episode is a digression serving very little narrative purpose, unless it creates an (unstated) reason to return to Circe's island for the funeral rites. A thematic purpose seems considerably more likely, particularly in the allusion to an oar as a grave marker, which also featured in the prophecy of Odysseus' demise. Consequently the death of Elpenor could be read as a 'shadow' episode highlighting an event or pattern in the life of Odysseus himself, in line with many other such parallelisms for which the Epic is renowned.

Particularly striking is the reference to a stairway, which is one of the commoner manifestations of the *axis mundi*. While Jacob slept at Bethel,[1] he saw a procession of angels passing up and down the stairway touching the Heavens. A similar feature can be seen on the west façade of Bath

Abbey in England, where 'souls' ascend a workaday ladder in angelic form, gazing upwards towards the benign image of God the Father (although at least two descend). The Pharaoh of Egypt also ascended to the sky by means of a ladder, and miniature ladder amulets have often been found among the grave goods of mummified remains in that country. "The ladder is in place for me to see the gods", says the *Book of the Dead*.[2] Every inhabited continent has similar beliefs in a world ladder or world staircase which overlaps imagistically with the cosmic tree. A Chinese tradition even names the tree-ladder, 'Fu-Sang', as one climbed daily by the Sun and descended at night. This is the *axis mundi* as a distinctly solar axis.

Elpenor, it will be remembered, fell from the roof of Circe's house. If he did in fact 'fall down the cosmic ladder' he confirms the house in its place *at the top of the world.* Odysseus too, 'falls' or 'sails' down a similar (but again, unstated) course on his voyage to Hades, and he will 'climb' back along an identical route to regain Circe's island (12, 1-3). He will be obliged to leave the light at the top of the world to fall into Kimmerian darkness, because descent (*'katabasis'*) is universally a necessary prelude to ascent of the spiritual kind. The best known in the Christian world is Christ's Harrowing of Hell ("and on the third day he rose again") but Sumerian literature has, in *Inanna's Journey,* the descent of a goddess to the very gates of the Underworld, and a return. There are antecedents to the motif in the many ancient vegetation rituals reflecting growth, decay and resurgence of plants from the dark earth, but there is also a fine metaphysical principle at the heart of such natural or mythically-imposed patterns. When the Creator is configured as the One from whom all manifestation emerges, all material phenomena 'fall' into an existence, which, although it is 'of the god', is not the god himself; to regain the One, the soul must 'climb back' to the original source of Being. Poor witless Elpenor failed to 'remember' the ladder so his falling was a stage in his mystical progress, or lack of same; Odysseus on the other hand rarely 'forgets'. His voluntary descent to Hades was also necessary and unavoidable (as Circe makes clear) but by accepting and surviving it he is privileged to continue the journey. He still has to discover an effective point of ascent but several encounters with near-death await him.

Before we allow the hero to complete the circle of his Adventures, we will try to unravel the particular mythic geography of Hades itself. Odysseus and his surviving companions will journey to Hades and Odysseus alone will gaze down into the pit of the Underworld.

Hades, as described to Odysseus and experienced by him.

Circe's narration: 10, 504-540; First Nekyia: 11, 1-330; 385-640; Second Nekyia: 24, 1-204.

The Hadean Underworld is the very opposite of the Isles of the Blessed, or Elysium, in the work of Pindar as in the epics of Homer. One place is dark and wretched, the other bright and joyful. The picture given in the *Odyssey* of these two Otherwordly locations conforms to a universal pattern of a place of blessings reached by ascent, and a place of suffering reached by descent. Such ideas are common to ancient cultures in Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, China, and Mesoamerica.[3] Whether influenced by near-death experiences or shamanic drug-induced visions of flight and fall (or, as has been suggested, a human cognitive inheritance which determines that all members of the human race shall think and feel in similar patterns), the thematic elements betray a remarkable consistency, albeit culturally nuanced as one would expect. Although it is difficult to categorise differences between Tartarus, Hades and Erebos (10, 528) in the works of our two earliest known Greek 'cosmologists', Hesiod and Homer, the three dark places below the Earth may be one and the same or named parts of the same territory. Homer's "gates of Hades, underneath the Earth's secret places" (24, 204) are not so very different from Hesiod's "shining gates" which appear to lie at "the ends and springs of misty Tartarus".[4] It is easy enough to sense that in comparison, Elysium and the Isles of the Blessed and the Olympian home of the gods, are bright and benevolent places of privilege. They fall into a fundamental duality of hell and paradise, mortality and immortality. But having already commented on the irregularity of the pattern in respect of the ambiguous Afterlife of Achilleus, and Menelaos too, we must be prepared for some in-between or transitional states reflecting successive re-locations of the soul on its journey.

Important to our understanding of the narrative at this point is exactly *why* the hero was to undertake an approximation to *katabasis,* the descent to Hades, though without entering the Underworld. His valour and determination were already proven beyond reproach and the next stage of his journey had already been determined, if not for him alone, then for other soul-travellers, to judge by Circe's clear recall of hazards, choices and consequences on the journey ahead. It seems that the epic as a mythicised record of traditional initiatory processes must have its descent. A later addition to the *Gilgamesh* epic describes the descent and return of Enkidu, with an account of the fates of the condemned very similar in

style to Odysseus' own vision of life in the world below.[5] Whatever the impetus to descent, it can be expected that since the poet gives (in considerable detail) movement *down,* structural necessity obliged him to conclude this series of semi-magical, fantastical episodes with movement *up,* to a place which is the diametric opposite to Hades, that is, to a place of light where life in all its joys and pleasures will be celebrated. Hades will prove to be the dark counterpart of Scheria, the light-filled land of the Phaiakians, which still awaits the traveller.

The most developed schemes of descent and return are to be found in the complex symbolism of the Egyptian *Books of the Dead.* A full account would delay us too long here, so we shall briefly record some of the most common motifs to be found in these ancient guides to the soul's itinerary, as they were earlier set out here in note form (chapter 1). Foremost among them is the image of the solar door or threshold[6] which defines the point of advancement; this has been identified here as a well-developed feature of the *Odyssey,* with the difference that geographical features such as islands or rocks often take over the doorway function. Guardians of the doors are common to both, so too is divestiture and decapitation (or cannibalism) and the involvement of Sun, Moon and stars as way-marks of progress. The journey is undertaken by boat, at night, and ends, completing the circle, at the twelfth hour with re-emergence into the light of day. Throughout the soul's journey the sacred baboon Thoth is employed in the role of psychopomp in much the same way as Hermes in Greek tradition, with whom he will later be merged in Hellenistic times.

A journey also sets in train the time of trial of the Biblical Jonah, whose attempt to evade the Lord's command to travel to Nineveh ('the hero journey') resulted in a storm at sea, another form of the battle at the doorway ('of change') which is also to be experienced by Odysseus. Again like the Homeric hero, Jonah falls asleep in the hold of the ship (sleep once again a symbol of forgetting, especially the soul's forgetting of its origins).[7] Like Joseph thrown into the pit, Jonah is 'cast down', this time into the sea, where he is swallowed by the fish (a form of death). The man is fully aware that he is 'living a metaphor' of descent and return, as he makes clear in his prayer to the Lord in the second chapter of Jonah: "out of the belly of Hell cried I" (2), "I went down to the bottoms of the mountains" (like Gilgamesh); "the Earth with her bars was without me" (doorway motif)… "yet thou hast brought up my life from corruption." (6). The man who had tried to evade the Lord's command is consigned to the abyss of the sea, where he enters Hell in the fishy form of the beast, who was to become the mediaeval Leviathan and the jaws of Hell, before being 'vomited up'; and here it is appropriate to remember the whirlpool

of Charybdis which 'vomits up' the wreckage of the hero's craft, thus serving as the eventual agent of his 'resurrection'. In a Greek context, there is also the swallowing and regurgitation of Jason from the belly of the dragon guarding the object of the Argonautic quest, the Golden Fleece, which provides another variant of the motif. All such myths involve a uterine element in which physical birth of the child serves as the metaphor *par excellence* for the birth of the soul; but a New Testament variation substitutes "a far country" for the separation motif, in this case the parable of the Prodigal Son. This "country" is probably Hades: for the son "was dead, and is alive again" (*Luke* 15: 24, 32). The returnee is fêted in just the same way as the other re-ascending heroes mentioned here, when he is re-clothed by his joyful parent, in, one must conclude, 'the body reincarnate'.

Having established some generalities and cross-cultural parallels of an archetypal theme, we may embark upon some specific points of detail. The *Iliad* holds a useful source of comparative material, albeit indirect, and certain records of cult practice at Olympia prove surprisingly informative.

The Descent

The *Iliad* gives only a sketchy account of Hades, a territory which lies below the Earth-plane and stretches out limitlessly. The *Odyssey* however provides information that the Underworld lies beyond Okeanos at the groves of Persephone (10, 509-511) - another reference to the 'flowery meadow' *omphalos,* in a place "thickly wooded" with poplars and willows. Hesiod's Tartarus (if that truly be an Underworld) is also to be found on the borders of Okeanos.[8] Little distinction need be made between 'beyond' and 'on the borders of'; it is enough for mythic purposes that both Homeric and Hesiodic Underworlds lie close to Okeanos, on the edge of a river-like body of water (or stars). Wherever it may be, Hades is the fated destination of the hero who must, according to Circe's prescription, endure the heroic ordeal of descent to the world of the dead. This is the route taken at various times by the likes of Orpheus, Herakles, the Egyptian deceased entering Rosetau, or Indic souls sinking into the bottomless darkness. Odysseus for his part will pour libations and offer food of the dead (white barley), slaughter the sacrificial ram and receive the prophecy of Teiresias. Although information concerning the journey home was promised earlier by Circe (10, 538f.) it is not forthcoming from the soothsayer, in fact Circe herself gives the necessary guidance on Odysseus' return to her island (12, 25ff.), but whatever the narrative impetus, Odysseus succeeds in fulfilling the elaborate mythologem which

requires the soul first to descend before it ascends to Heaven, and to encounter specific types of people who all play a part in the process of transition.

Odysseus survives his ordeal and takes away from the experience something more important than a mere aid to navigation: he acquires knowledge, especially knowledge concerning the fate of those who enter the Underworld and are revivified by his blood-libation to the point of acquiring speech. There is undoubtedly some echo here of historical cult practice at tomb or temple, even a cult of the dead. In broad chronological order, he learns his own fate (he *might* come home to Ithaka; he *must* make another journey, his long life, etc.) then by eliciting information from an array of men and women, he acquires, respectively, news (from Achilleus) that fame offers little comfort in Hades, even for heroes (11, 488ff.), that judgment at the throne of Minos awaits the dead man (11, 568-571) and that punishments may be perpetual (Tantalos and Sisyphos, 11, 582-600). Throughout, Odysseus affects a naïve surprise at all he is witnessing. Whatever he was intended to learn, the knowledge he took away must have included an acute awareness of the Underworld as a place best avoided, even by heroes. His encounter with Teiresias and the spirits of dead warriors, and his grieving mother, meet the thematic prototype of the Otherworldly journey known from other cultures which advance the vision of corpses, ancestors and relatives as a central element in any Afterlife experience.[9] This episode is too well-rooted in verifiable tradition to be viewed as totally original.

What is new to the modern reader, and for all its obscurity, exciting, is the suggestion that the way to Hades occupies a definable point in the night sky. First one follows the path, it says, and then one passes the gate. There are helpful markers along the way which must be recognised and respected. As van Gennep noted, these may be a sacred rock, tree, river or lake, but be warned: such places must be accorded all respect.[10] Hence the need for guardians and guides such as Circe, Kalypso and Hermes to help the souls pass safely through the liminal stages of their perilous journey.

Paths, Rocks and Streams

Odysseus opened the pit into Hades in a land of perpetual darkness (11, 15f.) It lies in a grove of poplars and willows on the shore of Ocean (10, 509f.), at the meeting point of two rivers, Pyriphlegethon and Kokytos, which flow into Acheron (10, 513f.); where ‘two become one’. “There is / a rock there, at the junction of two thunderous rivers” (10, 514f.) he is told by Circe, as she prepares the hero for his trial to come. In

similar vein, in the final book of the *Odyssey*, Hermes escorted the souls of the deceased suitors down "mouldering" (dark?) pathways until they "passed the Ocean stream" (24, 10f.) and came to "the White Rock" (11). It is reasonable to assume that the 'Oceanic' shore location, the confluence of the rivers and the adjacent rock may be traditional markers of Hades' entrance place, since up to this point the two episodes (in books 10 and 24) have revealed a common topography. The passage in the first Nekyia did not mention subsequent features such as Helios' gates, the country of dreams, or meadow of asphodel (24, 1-14), but the parallel is strong enough to hold. These elements, the path, the rock and the confluence of rivers provide the initial focus. There is apparently only one stream of Ocean, one rock, one set of gates, one country of dreams; but the rock is found at the meeting of two rivers, while at several points elsewhere Homer speaks of two destinations and two judges of the dead presiding one at each. Path, rock, judges and the confluence of rivers are the most helpful elements to the process of decoding, so they will be examined one at a time.

The Paths

Paths taken by the dead are routes to a destination familiar to the psychopomp, but it is to be noted that in both books 10 and 24 they lead through darkness and in the latter instance to a set of gates associated with the Sun (24, 12). The darkness experienced by Hermes and the souls may be that of the cosmic night beyond the solar orbit (or a dark backcloth surrounding the Sun as it transits through the night hours, on the other side or under side, where its journey can never be witnessed) and the souls are being led to a place where some may be potentially fit to pass 'through the Sun' at one of those significant crossing points used by Odysseus. Homer does not clarify (in Lattimore's translation) whether Hermes and his train passed *through* or *by* the gates (24, 12); but in some fashion the dream-country and the meadow lie further along the route. One interesting point of this section which may yield some information is that the way to Hades appears to cross the Sun's ecliptic or run close to it, for "the gates of Helios the sun" must occupy a specific place on that solar circle. The gates are one of the more frequently mentioned markers of the house of Hades.

Their fateful course leads, surprisingly, to "the meadow of asphodel" lying further along the route, after "the country of dreams" (12f.) which must be "the country of souls", since as the mother of Odysseus explains, the soul "flitters out like a dream and flies away" (11, 222) and is not consumed by the fire. The asphodel meadow will be a location for

Odysseus' last sighting of Achilleus (11, 539). The gibbering souls following Hermes, however, at the introduction to the Second Nekyia, can have little idea of their destiny.

At a minimum, book 24 offers the notion of country of death or sleep close by a woody grove, or flowery meadow, the two located at one of the solar portals, perhaps of solstice or equinox; the low point of the winter solstice suggests itself as the darkest and dankest of the available options. At that season the sun falls to its lowest and may be imagined as lying at his dark underworld place where daily, but at night, he sinks from view into the southern hemisphere.[11]

The Rock

This notable feature appears to lie somewhere between Ocean's stream and the Sungates (24, 11f.) and close to the junction of two rivers (10, 514f.), if the rock of book 10 may be assumed to be the same as the White Rock mentioned in book 24. This is much surer ground. The mythic role of white rocks *and* white islands (since islands are but 'large rocks' in the sea)[12] in tales concerning the 'closing of the pit' has been amply detailed in ancient folklore and literature and is still active in some popular tradition to this day. Whether it is a stone, plug or island, the 'white rock' closes that same *omphalos*-pit which has often been mentioned here, and prevents the inrush of floodwaters from a central point lying on, below, or above the Earth. It is capable of becoming the *omphalos* stone of Delphi, the sacred baetyl apparently worshipped in Minoan ritual, or the foundation stone of any building given stellar orientation. At times a rock prevents the gap in the skies from bursting open; at others, it prevents the floods welling up from the abyss below. It is also likely to be the same rock holding back the primordial waters in the Vedic tradition, as well as the primordial island mound serving as the start point of the world's creation in Egyptian cosmogony of which we spoke in an earlier chapter as the possible star Deneb, at the galactic centre of the Milky Way. The dual role of the rock or island consists of marking an opening into sky, land or underworld, and holding back the destructive forces lying beyond or below.

The perspective of this simple image cannot be dismissed as mere geography. The Vedic 'rock' carries the same values as the nave of the wheel, axle point, navel or *kha* ('cavity', 'zero', 'infinity'), which are all variforms of the centre point of the heavens, encountered elsewhere as Dante's "punta dello stelo al cui la prima rota va dintorno",[13] or for that matter, T.S. Eliot's "still point of the turning world."[14] It is, says Coomaraswamy, the Asian iconographer and metaphysician, "the receptacle

and fountain of all order, formative ideas, and goods". It would seem that the rock functions in these cosmic contexts as a door capable of opening and closing, for when Indra opens the "closed or hidden naves or rocks" he releases a river or fountain of life from the mystical, central place where all potentiality is shut up within.[15] If this rock features in the journey of the souls of the dead (as a "White Rock") in the Homeric eschatology, it does so with all suitability, for this is indeed the source of life and the point from where the progress of the dead may be halted or diverted - possibly into 'return'. It is fully appropriate that the white rock of the *Odyssey* is identified with the confluence of four rivers which express not only the meeting point of four directions but the combined weight of four bodies of water: it provides a potential for deluge.

The white *omphalos* stone of Delphi which closed the watery chasm of prophecy has many imitators (or even predecessors) in the Greek world, and these make common cause with other resolutions of parallel Flood legends in neighbouring cultures. The Hebrew texts record a shard placed over the Tehom abyss at the very centre of Jerusalem, where the ancient temple of Solomon once stood, on the Rock; the role of this 'retaining shard' in holding back the "overflowing scourge" of cosmic deluge is made clear by the prophet Isaiah in verses which classify the stone as "a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation" which holds back the "overflowing waters".[16] Islam has the cubic stone of Mecca originally placed over a sacred spring and still marking the ideological centre of the Islamic world, just as Jerusalem identifies the centre of Hebrew identity. It is such centres as these which are at risk of disaster, and, *by very reason of their centrality*, must contain a 'blocking stone' of some kind to prevent an overwhelming deluge. If the entrance to Homer's Hades is identified by such a stone it is because the souls of the dead have reached not only the entrance to the Underworld but a conceptual Centre; and the White Rock serves as a marker to both.

Scheria

The White Rock has a companion-piece on the paradisal counterpart of Hades, the home of the Phaiakians, Scheria - where the hero is received so kindly. On his departure from that island, the magical ship struck by angry gods to punish the effrontery of the Phaiakians is turned into a rock, close off the shore (13, 156f.) and clearly visible to the city dwellers. The Phaiakians narrowly escape having their city buried under a mountain (158; 177). Here is a subtle interplay of associations between a ship (with its vertical mast), the sea, an island, a city, and a mountain. Taken together

(the ship becoming a rock or mountain, the city *nearly* becoming a rock or mountain, when movement and life would have been stilled in both cases) they come together as a precise and meaningful unit: the conjunction of the *axis* with the *omphalos*. The navel-centre is now fully closed at the hands of the angry deities, with the result that the proud people of Scheria who occupy an island "like a shield upon the water" (and every shield has a centre stud, its *omphalos*) may henceforward live no longer close to the gods. Furthermore, the same motif of the rock creates a connection between the entry point giving downwards, to Hell, and the entry point opening upwards, to Heaven. One, it would appear, lies above the other along a defined *axis*, but due to the action of the affronted gods, none will travel that way again.

'The Jumping-Off Place'

The White Rock which the *Odyssey* associates with the descent of souls (24, 11), appears as a place of transformation in many cultures. In Greek tradition, the Rock is best known in its character as the 'souls' jumping-off place', that is, the headland of Leukas, the white island, where a cliff juts out westwards into the sea.[17] West is the direction of death, since it witnesses the daily fall of the Sun, and the whiteness of the rock may help to identify this headland as the meeting point of the directions in an esoteric version of the physical geography. White represents all that is purest and unsullied, hence divine. The *bindu* point at the centre of the cosmic mandala cosmogram is always white, to indicate connection with divinity.

Nagy views the 'Gates of the Sun' of the Homeric passage as substantially the same the 'Gates of the Underworld'.[18] This interpretation sits well with the idea of a rock as a place where body and soul alike 'fall into death'. Thus, when Odysseus opens the pit into Hades, he is truly looking down into the Underworld; and the Rock marks the opening as surely as the *omphalos* stone of Delphi identifies the mouth of the prophetic chasm, or the cubic stone of Mecca (over a spring) reveals to the faithful of Islam the centre-point of their world.

When his digging penetrates the surface of the middle plane of the Earth, Odysseus is to all intents and purposes opening an *omphalos*-point allowing communication between worlds. He has come as close as is possible to entering the Underworld without being swallowed by it; therefore he is free to return to Circe and to resume his broken circular course. If he had been not been a traveller and 'seeker' under the patronage of Circe, but an incorporate soul, he would have had to confront

the judge of the Underworld, or in time perhaps, the judge in the upper world.

Judges and Twins

Homer is quite clear that one of the Cretan brothers, Rhadamanthys, acts as judge in the Elysian kingdom where Menelaos will enjoy a carefree immortality and the easiest of lives beyond Earth-circling Okeanos (4, 561-565). Minos, on the other hand, is the sibling who holds court at the gates of the Underworld (11, 568-571). The dead throng about him at these gates, asking to be judged, "arguing their cases" (570), from which it may deduced (and common sense also suggests) that the dead in Hades, or about to enter there, are anxious to know their status and anxious too that a favourable judgment might transpose them to a better place. In this, the only reference Homer makes to Minos, the famous king of Crete, "glorious son of Zeus" (568), one may detect the ancient mysteries of Knossos with its Minotaur and labyrinthine journey to the centre-as-Centre, and return from danger and death; an Odyssean theme but an Orphic one too, hinting at a very ancient pre-Greek eschatology.

So we have two judges in two separate and opposing places, exercising similar judicial functions and identified one with the other by a blood tie, which is so often a device to indicate both complementarity and opposition. As twins, brothers of simultaneous birth from the same parents (or occasionally separate fathers, by the same mother) they display contrary natures at the same time as they prove their common heritage. In these respects and probably others they conform to the universal model of divine twins such as Seth and Osiris, the Hindu Asvins, and Romulus and Remus, to name but a few. The Dioskouroi brothers Castor and Pollux are the best known in the Greek world, and they, in common with the others named, are intimately related to a universal One, the first mover of the cycle of creation. As symmetrical and contrary beings their ultimate links are with the lunar and solar cycles and the fluctuation between night and day.[19] We have Homer's word concerning Castor and Pollux that the brothers 'live' in the "life-giving Earth" but alternately, "every other day", Pollux the 'immortal' twin, being fathered by Zeus, sharing half his immortality with his brother, who was fathered by a mortal, Tyndareos (11, 298-304). "They live still every other day; the next day they are dead" (303f.). The result is a state of cosmic balance, since defined by the alternating phases of the Sun, and similar to that achieved by the release of Persephone from the Underworld for the spring and summer seasons when she revived the land and restored its fertility. A full assessment of the

cosmic roles of these brothers and their close connection to the Dioskouroi, for which there is not space here, would need to address the meaning of the H-shaped *'dokana* frame' which the latter carry in Spartan iconography, a frame suggestive of the Frame of Time (linking solstice points), which both unites and separates. For the moment we must be content to note that in the persons of their human representatives, whether Castor and Pollux or the Dioskouroi, Cook sees supports of the two halves of the world, the upper and lower hemispheres, and the darker and lighter worlds which are reflective one of the other.[20] The same observation could be made of Circe and Kalypso who are not named as sisters but are certainly complementary mirror images of one another, sisters in spirit if not in fact.

Such observations help to clarify the fundamental cosmic potential of any strong pairings presented to us by the poet. The "dread goddesses", we shall argue, occupy diagonally opposite places linked by a 'cosmic arm' (shaped by the trajectory of their "golden, flying shuttle") which alternately rises and falls, taking their conceptual 'homes' with it. If the Cretan judges occupy the same or similar role as Circe and Kalypso, and the Dioskouroi, and occupy the same kind of space, then the realms of Elysium and Hades may be brought alongside as oppositional features occupying the same mythic role: they are each 'light' and 'upper' in opposition to 'dark' and 'lower'. The human personalities which in myth translate the two directions, the two seasons of the productive year or the two fates of man, can be brought together to show them as multiforms of a single phenomenon. This is a fair supposition in terms of the fluidly syncretising nature of mythic reasoning. It remains to be seen where the two worlds of man's Afterlife are located in space, and the nature of the 'cosmic arm' which provides a bond capable of holding both territories in permanent, balanced apposition.

At this point we are ready for 'arms', or 'paths', or 'rivers' which, whatever their forms and natures, all serve a related function.

The Confluence of Rivers

The place with the greatest potential for resolving the puzzle of Hades' location is the confluence of certain 'paths', for it has become clear through studies in comparative mythology and the archaeological record also that certain conjunctions, including the geographical confluence of rivers, were historically the object of eschatological speculation as well as ritual elaboration. Our review of Odysseus' circular journey has already revealed how specific solar locations have been treated in antiquity as

crossing-point places of influence affecting the transformation of consciousness. Now one can add that in Britain alone, countless sites reveal traces of tombs and temples marking places where even insignificant rivers either joined forces or parted to go their separate ways. This is far more than river worship: it is an identification of places where waterways meet or divide as the birthplace of *paths of choice*. At the meeting or separating point so revered, the "road not taken" is to be measured against the elective route, where the act of choosing implies an exercise of judgment akin to self-determination. The Indic doctrines concerning the ford or crossing place, *tirtha,* as a place of transformation on the physical pilgrimage are still actively pursued today in both esoteric and exoteric modes. For 'physical crossing' in these liminal places, one must read 'transformation of mind or soul'.

In his other great Epic, Homer has gifted us a dramatic version of the meeting of the rivers as a place where life and death run close together.

Skamandros meets Simoeis

The *Iliad* makes the junction of the rivers Skamandros and Simoeis a feature of the plain where the bloody conflict between Trojans and Achaians is fought to the death for ten long years. Other tributaries, six in all, spread their flood across the plain and empty into the salt sea in the west, making a total of eight, but it is Skamandros and his gentler brother who occupy the interest of the poet. East of the plain lies the Ida mountain range with an ancient altar, the Gargarum, Zeus' holy ground (*Iliad* 8, 47f.), where great Zeus settled to view the city of Troy and the scene of battle (51f.), and where he subsequently raised the golden scales of justice with their portions of death, deciding the fates of Trojans and Achaians alike (68-70). It is totally relevant that the high god, in this high place, should balance the scales "by the middle" (72) thereby achieving a just distribution between the parties with a device which is the very model of axial stability and 'true-ness'. In this eighth book the Gargarum is strongly associated with justice; but the audience will undoubtedly recall that the peak of Gargaros, the highest in the Mount Ida range, was also the scene of Hera's deception of Zeus (14, 292) which led to their lovemaking and the springing up of fresh grass, clover, crocus and hyacinth from the meadow where they lay together in love (346-349). Mount Ida with its altar and its abundance, its connotations of justice, life and now, fertility, is the very image of the distant home of the Olympian gods which Zeus, on this latter occasion, spurns in favour of a pastoral idyll conducted discretely on the Idan mountain under the concealing cloak of a golden

cloud (330-345). Despite this relocation to a humbler terrain, such references to a fertile meadow and the work of justice normally associated with the omphalic point of the *axis* (here, the highest *omphalos*) reveal that Mount Ida is a replication of a heavenly Olympia, now set on the physical terrain of the Troad.

Pastoral Life and Death

The Trojan plain below Gargarum is destined to be a place of death, but early in the narrative it is configured as the very image of teeming life. Even Skamandros occupies a blossoming meadow (*Iliad* 2, 467) yet the banks of the river where the combatants gather are overshadowed by intimations of death through their identification with leaves and flowers (468), each destined to fall in time with the seasonal rotation of all forms of plant life. This is but one of Book 2's highly developed series of pastoral similes in which the gathering army of Agamemnon is first configured in terms evoking disorder and confusion, with a forest fire racing across the mountain tops and then with flights of geese and swans and cranes which whirl and clash, sending their voices echoing across the plain; next they are flies about the milk pails; but finally order is 'righted' by the victorious army of the Achaians and their leaders, and 'goats' are ordered and separated by the individual 'goatherds' of the noble Greeks (2, 455-477). The total effect amounts to an expression of a vast, pent-up energy in association with equally energetic, multiple life forms; centrifugal, outward movement is finally harnessed into centripetal, inward force which organises itself by reference to a central point. In many ways, too, the extreme abundance of this plain approximates to the magical flowery meadow where life and death are also placed in close proximity. Ultimately however the content speaks of cosmic energy and cosmic order.

The Tomb of Ilos

The waters of Skamandros link the mountain source on Mount Ida to the coast in the west, where the gravest action of the war will be conducted against the Achaian wall. It is there that the Greeks will bury the dead washed up by "the fair waters of Skamandros", "while their souls went down into the house of Hades" (7, 327-330).[21] The river which at first presented as an image of cool purity, "silvery", and "deep-running" (11, 8; 130) is transformed into a river of fire and place of acute suffering by the slaughter carried out on its banks (342-367).

Not far inland lies the confluence of the rivers which are known in a later episode as the place of the tomb of Ilos. The river, tomb and the ford appear as topographical features in the moving tale of Priam's journey to recover the body of his son Hektor from desecration at the hands of Achilleus, a journey seen by many as another akin to Odysseus' own voyage to Hades, and in the case of Priam, a journey undertaken "as if he went to his death" (24, 328). It is to the tomb of Ilos, founder of Ilium (Troy), that Priam makes his way, descending first "down from the city" (24, 229) to the flat land of the plain, travelling westwards until he meets the psychopomp Hermes; then he and his wagonload of precious goods are conducted across the ford of the river Skamandros and led into the camp of Achilleus (24, 345-351). It should be no surprise that at this point darkness descends (351) to mark passage into the Underworld, at the very moment when men and horses step into the river; and that Priam's return to Troy will coincide with the rising of the dawn Sun (695). The 'Hadean' visit coincides precisely with the hours of darkness, and the 'death' of the Sun. Hermes' untoward transformation into a handsome youth (346f.) may even be intended to show the process of rebirth to which Hektor may be destined. Skamandros is now likened to the fiery river of Hades, a Styx, or that fiery member of the group of four, Pyriphlegethon, of whom there is more to say.

Appearing in these episodes are three or four easily identifiable markers of entrances to the Underworld in the form of a tomb ('Death') with its *stele* (a marker equal to a 'White Rock') on the fertile banks of a river Skamandros / Okeanos ("meadow of asphodel"), at the junction of rivers (Skamandros meets Simoeis); in other words, at "the junction of two thunderous rivers", as described in book 10, verse 515 of the *Odyssey*. It may be assumed that the river was crossed at a fording place, which is highly relevant to a cosmic model, as we shall see.

The true geographical point of the junction of Skamandros and Simoeis retains no useful material evidence, but there is one ancient site which has acquired and preserved all the elements identified by Homer as markers to an entrance to the Otherworld: Olympia.

The Topography of Olympia

Remarkably, the tomb of Ilos located at the river junction had an ancient counterpart at the site now famous for the birth of competitive games. This historic place was built around the tomb of Pelops,[22] another founding father who reputedly gave his name to the Peloponnese. The Olympian tomb also stood at the ford of the rivers Alpheios and Kladios

near the entrance to the ground. The Games founded at Olympia in the eight century BCE on a site inhabited even in Mycenaean times were to become renowned for the Panhellenic athletic contests held there every four years, but this was a religious site in the first instance, devoted particularly to the worship of Zeus, said to have defeated his father Kronos on this very spot. Claims have been made for the very great antiquity of Olympia to the extent that "men of the Golden Age" are reported by Pausanias[23] to have constructed a shrine there to Kronos himself. Again, the hero Herakles reputedly diverted the streams of Alpheios and Kladios at Olympia in order to cleanse the Augean stables of the accumulated filth of the years. Evidence for the practice of cult libations at the Pelopion, built over the ancient tumulus of Pelops, comes from Pindar in his first *Olympian Ode* (90), relating how a yearly sacrifice of a black ram (instigated by Herakles, it is said) was offered by way of expiation of Pelops' crime against Myrtilus and in the hope that the founding hero could finally make his way to the Isles of the Blessed.[24] The sacrifice of a black ram was a similarly effective agent bringing great heroes, including Achilleus, to the mouth of the pit where the revitalised victor of Troy was able to converse with Odysseus. The blood offering may even have played a causative role in Achilleus' departure for the field of asphodel (11, 539), possibly to be identified with a Land of the Blessed comparable with the resting place of ancient Pelops.

Much later, in the second century CE, Pausanias[25] added further testimony to Olympic cult practice by confirming that the Pelopion stood at the junction of two rivers, and was entered by a western gate; it was surrounded by a grove of deciduous trees, he tells us (cf. the groves of Persephone, *Odyssey* 10. 509f., containing, or near, "tall black poplars") and a nearby pit received blood offerings. The site at Olympia receives the waters of Alpheios, its several feeder streams, and Kladios, from eastern mountains close to Mount Lykaion, flowing from there across the plain of Elis before emptying, like Skamandros, into the western sea. At some stage the site must have been identified as conforming to a recognisable model and subsequently further elaborated, in order to reinforce the perceived similarities. Deliberate and idealistic re-shaping of landscape in order to create an "as above, so below" correspondence has had a long history, and has appeared several times in these pages, but whether the original model was Homer's own, or drawn from traditional sources, only later elaborated at Olympia, is one of many possibilities too speculative to delay us here, for the indications are that cult practice at river junctions and other fording places derived from a far greater theatre of action - the sky which has been ever-present in the consciousness of man.

Some clues to a cosmic original may be garnered from Pindar's now familiar lines in the second *Olympian Ode* (68-76) which enlarge our understanding of sacred landscapes in the context of ritual athleticism. To the north of the stadium, he tells us, stood the tower of Kronos, which he relates specifically to the way to the Isles of the Blessed. This can be no other, in view of the co-identity of column and mountain in the lore of the *axis* tied to the heavens, than the mountain named for Kronos: Mount Kronion, visible from the ancient site. The archaeological record also reveals this area as the past location of treasuries, goddess shrines, and a place where successful competitors celebrated their victories and were fêted and feasted. Pindar's verse intimates that the victorious heroes of Olympia were to receive glory in the Afterlife on those very same Isles of the Blessed and a life of ease in which to celebrate their exceptional prowess. They had only to find their way to the mountain and claim the reward for exceptional *arête,* the individual excellence which conferred eternal fame on the victor. The unusual nature of Pindar's reference to the Afterlife, which was commented upon in earlier pages as a possible Orphic element, is in keeping with the ethos of the games recorded at Olympia and detailed, too, in the funerary games for Patroklos: death and the celebration of physical strength are closely associated, for reasons now unclear, but conceivably concerned with the continuance or renewal of the life just passed. This accumulation of evidence is leading to a strong indication that from the earliest times, certain landscapes were identified as inherently 'holy' and preserved as such with a multitude of rites, ceremonies and legends recalling the foundation of a country or emergence of a racial group. It constitutes a myth of origins. The sacred identity of the site at Olympia would have been confirmed by recognition that the terrain had a visible celestial counterpart, which, according to the law of correspondences, would have been sufficient proof that the sites were a reflection of each other, with all that this implied in terms of sanctity and legitimating power of a political order.

Like the layered landscape of the Trojan plain which consists of the height of Mt. Ida, the plain itself, below, and the entrances to the Underworld implied by the burial sites and their cult, Olympia had the tiered natural architecture of twin-peaked Mt. Lykaon with its Zeus shrine, the level site, and the Underworld focus of the tomb of Pelops. They shared the cosmic model, even to the meeting of rivers and an entry to the lower world lying in the sunset position, west of the cosmic mountain. But the meeting of rivers on the middle plain is crucial detail which completes the identification, and suggests that the development of both Olympia and Homer's Troy was inspired by a common model.

All these remarks concerning the meeting of rivers (confluence or convergence) have reached a point where one might profitably place Greek tradition concerning such matters in a comparative relationship with the same phenomenon in distant cultures. Our argument is that a visible model in the skies provided the essential elements for a mythic rendering of the facts, wherever in the world the phenomenon was witnessed.

An article by W.F.J. Knight (1935) on a prehistorical ritual pattern was able to argue for elements common to both book 6 of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and traditions followed by Malekulan Islanders of the New Hebrides. In respect of the each, he found that the ascent of the soul from the Land of the Dead required, variously, fighting off hostile spirits on the way to a cave near the sea shore, dead souls dwelling in a wooded country, a female guardian to the cave (which only the worthy may enter) and a crossing of a river with the help of a 'ferryman'. Readers will recognise many elements common to the journey of Odysseus, which is obviously a source for Virgil but less plausibly so for the other two narrators of the tradition, or for that matter the Orphic mythology of descent and return. All of which suggests a universal model.

The Epirote Greeks of the west coast of the mainland constructed their own model of the mouth of Hades at Theospratia on the banks of the river Acheron, where the latter flows through the gorges and disappears underground at various points. There they built a Nekromanteion consisting of preparatory chambers for the candidate seeking advice from the Underworld, or House of the Dead. The surviving monuments reveal that much ingenuity was exercised, in one case in the regulation of the waters of the Acheron through a 'ribbed' channel which acoustically enhanced the 'voices' of the dead (probably the priests' voices) and also, presumably, the sound of the river, making it suitably "thunderous". This tells us that both the presence and sound of water was in some way important to the ritual of transformation at the mouth of a conceptual Hades.

The importance of the meeting of rivers and their connection with the Underworld can be brought up to date with reference to the sacred landscapes of the great Incan civilisation of the Andes, where the same reverence for the north and its stars prevailed even among residents of the southern hemisphere. To be brief, a case history focused on the city of Cuzco (which translates as 'centre' or 'navel') can provide a more than adequate survey of a cosmic model apt for comparison with the entrance to Hades in the *Odyssey*. As described in an earlier chapter on fording the sky, Cuzco appears to have been designed to reflect the meeting of the

rivers of the Milky Way and the star Deneb which lies at that convergence. Cuzco is not the only instance of such thinking.

The Mayan people of Central America mythologised the landscape in much the same way as the more southerly Incas. Their conversion of astronomical features into biological or related forms provides an object lesson in mythic thinking which can usefully be introduced here as we try to understand the potential of the Milky Way as a Homeric road to the land of the dead. The Way is formalised in Mayan iconography[26] as a cosmic tree, a mountain, a female ('Great Mother'), a snake, a road or a river. The last two are conventional interpretations of the linear form of the Way, but fully recognisable in the four others is a nexus of forms common to the *axis mundi*. When it comes to the space known as the Dark Rift, where the Way splits into two 'rivers', then the imagery draws upon the traditional *omphalos* forms, such as a cleft in a tree, a cave in a mountain, a birth canal or uterus, a mouth or a head. Also, for the Mayans the 'White' Road of the Way itself yields place to a 'Black' Road which may be presumed as the opposite of the white Milky Way, opposite also in its association with a different spiritual realm or the means of gaining it. Sure enough this is confirmed in the sixteenth century literature collating (in Spanish) Mayan oral traditions at least as old as the last century BCE. The greatest of these works is the *Popul Vuh*, where the Black Road speaks of its 'mouth' (the Dark Rift), where begins the road to the Underworld. But also, and at first sight rather confusingly, the Dark Rift is a place of birth or rebirth.

When the fortuitous meeting of the Way with the course of the ecliptic is conceived as a crossroads, with four roads leading to a point of conjunction in the navel of the Dark Rift, they are colour-coded by the Maya as black, white, red and green. The Black Road of the Maya is that part of the way which points or leads north; the White Road is the starry part leading south from the ecliptic; 'Red' and 'Green' Roads are the arms of the ecliptic to the west and east respectively. The sky was subsequently divided into four seasonal quarters relative to the division established by these four cosmic roads, of which the most important quarter was that in which the winter solstice occurred in December. This conjunction of time and place was celebrated not only as the moment of the Sun's renewal but also the time and place of a soul's rebirth through a portal open into another world.

When, as in this instance, the Way is considered in its relationship with the ecliptic, then one encounters a tradition wherein the 'solar warrior' is born from the 'mouth of the monster', or in other words, from the Dark Rift. Despite the vast geographical and cultural distance separating them,

the Mesoamerican cosmology shares certain points with the Ancient Egyptian system, which imagined the Sun born every day from the 'cosmic portal' between the legs of the body of Nut, as Milky Way, and precisely the point of emergence for the Sun and its semi-human embodiments as warriors or heroes.

The Mayan Cosmic Tree or Milky Way has a dividing rift (portrayed as a mouth at the foot of the trunk). In astronomical terms, says David Kelley,[27] the top of the tree will touch the house of Gemini, and the base, which is the mouth of the monster but also the 'Creation Place', will lie in Sagittarius. These same positions on the Zodiac, the cosmic tree and serpent, the solstices and seasons, and much more that finds echoes in Mesoamerican astronomical myth, will all finally reveal their importance to the eschatology of Homer once we come to interpret the roles of Circe and Kalypso in the circular ecliptic journey of the hero. For, amazingly (and this cannot have been anticipated at the outset of this enquiry) the American and Greek cosmologies and related metaphysics differ only in lesser, culturally-related details.

Hades in the Sky

On the basis of the distant model, the entrance to Hades (or its many cousins) may be imagined to lie in that dark area of the sky that apparently ceases to be part of the brilliant arm of the galaxy yet lies close to it. Although it may seem contradictory that a dark and misty Hades should open at the same place as the point of creative coming-into-being associated with the bright Sun, an explanation can be found in the *axis* concept postulating two-way flow, for an *omphalos*-point which allows journeys between a sunny upper world and a dark lower realm and a reversible journey along this single pathway is all that is required to place Heaven and Hell on a single point of access, in, as we have suggested, the same visible point in the night sky. So if indeed Hades, or its entrance, was imagined to lie in the cleft of the Milky Way, then Odysseus must have left Circe to ride the road of Okeanos (or Milky Way) in a path of descent along the 'White' path of the stars leading south of the ecliptic crossroads, down through the dark country of the Kimmerians in the black cleft where the two rivers divided. Eventually he would come to the very navel-centre of the Dark Rift, where he would dig his opening pit and look down into the world of departed spirits. This navel-centre, as noted earlier, was characterised by a white rock, a set of solar gates (evidently gates of a solstice or equinox), a grove of evergreen (hence 'immortal') black poplars and "fruit perishing willows", which, whatever their relationship

with their fruits, are deciduous trees (10, 508-510). In this small detail the entrance to Hades is characterised as relevant to both life *and* death, as indeed it appears to be in the Mayan eschatology.

Once the circular journey has been fulfilled and Odysseus sent on his way to Scheria by Kalypso, there will be time and occasion to consider exactly where the two most desirable islands (Ithaka and Scheria) are to be found. From the evidence of this chapter, we may anticipate that they will lie at an opposite spatial extreme to Hades but could still be identifiable in terms of the Sun's passage and the positioning of the Milky Way. The same topography will cast new light on the exact location of the islands which include Odysseus' own island of Ithaka and perhaps also the symbolic basis of the journey.

In the centre of our galactic arm of the Way (the only part visible from Earth) in the dark space between the waters there are certain stars, of which one may qualify as the White Rock named by Homer as a marker to Hades. Also, where there are rivers, there are bridges, fords or crossings. From the frequency with which objects and landscape features are universally interpreted according to esoteric values, it may be expected that the crossing in question can become a transition between worlds.

PART III:

THE EASTERN SEMICIRCLE

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE CIRCULAR JOURNEY FROM CIRCE TO KALYPSO

Once returned to Circe, then disengaged from her, Odysseus is directed by the goddess herself along a route which will encompass the eastern hemisphere of the Earth (or those directions extended into space). In her new, softer *persona*, Circe promises they will come safely through their coming trials (12, 25ff.). The god himself will help Odysseus to "remember" (38) but the goddess makes clear the necessity of decision-making on Odysseus' part: "you yourself must consider / this in your own mind" (57f.). Some degree of Self Will is implicated in the success (or otherwise) of the hero's progress onwards from her island, by which one may understand both narrative progress and some transformation of the Self. So the hero departs from the hostess who has detained him for a year and sets sail on a favourable, following wind. All seems to promise well, not least because a "harmless wind" (167) is blowing the ship onwards towards the island of the dangerous enchantresses.

The Sirens of the North (12, 39-54; 158-200)

Odysseus is now re-entering the circle which from which he stepped aside to sail to Circe's fabled island, only to be sent down an *axis* to Hades, and return. The goddess has finally set him back on his necessary path. There is however no avoiding the disturbing ambivalence of the direction allocated to the Sirens and the point of Odysseus' re-entry: the all-powerful north. The north, in shamanic schemes, is the upward direction where divinity is located, and although the Siren-sisters are certainly not *the* divinity, they have exceptional powers appropriate to that superior being: they know everything, and offer that knowledge to the hapless traveller. In many significant ways, their gift echoes Satan's temptation of Jesus Christ on the mountain, when the Saviour was offered knowledge of that kind which favours self-interest, but not ultimately the evolution of the higher Self. In both instances, the kind of power on offer is designed to be seductive, but if the recipient is a man of integrity he will

recognise its falseness. It is empty knowledge, which Odysseus finds the strength to refuse. Perhaps that strength was activated to some degree by the fact that he was bound by his fellow sailors to the mast-tree of his vessel. Like a tree, or a column of the house, or a high mountain, the mast fulfils the function common to all, as a marker of an *axis mundi.* If the ship itself is to be considered as a temple, as seems quite possible,[1] the *axis* can be understood as fulfilling its traditional role by stabilising itself in the body of a floating temple, the equivalent of the *omphalos*.

The Song Birds

The deadly singing maidens of the north have long been represented in art and literature as 'bird-females' akin to the soul-bird, *ba,* seen in Egyptian iconography. But Homer tells us very little about the appearance of his Sirens and the record from monuments is puzzling and sometimes contradictory. As with other episodes, the folkloric element is not far away. Indo-European myths and especially the Irish legends are full of tales of distant, blessed islands ruled by female enchanters, many of whom sing, like the Sirens, or the Celtic mermaids elsewhere. Erwin Rohde has argued for a pre-Homeric origin for such islands (including Phaiakia and the Islands of the Blest)[2] which may go some way towards explaining the wide distribution of the theme, although not its inner sense. The Sirens may be ambiguous, but one particular characteristic of their island gives a clue to their character as yet another pair of portal guardians.

The Meadow

The bones of the Sirens' victims ('death') lie close to a meadow of flowers ('life'). Homer's enchantresses occupy an island (167) where the bones of dead men pile up on a beach (45f.). They must be the remains of other travellers who attempted the journey but failed close to their goal.

The flowery meadow in question lies behind the shore (45; 158). Here is a motif that can usefully be followed to other geographical locations: to the island of Kalypso (5, 72ff.), for example or to the Underworld where Achilleus "stalked away in long strides across the meadow of asphodel" upon hearing good news of his son (11, 539; cf. 24, 11-13). From other episodes we have learned that souls pass "the Ocean stream" to come to the "meadow of asphodel", and perhaps to the plain of Elysium near Ocean (4, 563f.). In this last case, no meadow (flowery or otherwise) is mentioned, but the blissful climate and easy life suggest that abundant flora may be understood. Hesiod has described the Blessed Isles granted

by Zeus to be a home for the heroes of Troy as a distant place, "at the ends of Earth", close to "deep swirling Ocean" and moreover, he endows the Isles with time-defying, thrice-yearly production of "honey-sweet fruit" from "the bounteous Earth".[3] Most significantly of all, "Cronos rules over them; for the father of men and gods released him from his bonds" (164f.) That is to say, the chosen of Zeus, the happy heroes "untouched by sorrow" (169) were given a far-off land which is *timeless*: hence the unusual fertility and human felicity associated with the Island of the Blest. And we have already had occasion to remember Zeus' seduction of Hera on Mount Ida in the clouds above the peaks, which caused the flowers to burst into bloom beneath the divine lovers (*Iliad* 14, 346-349). Such paradise gardens lie far away from the usual haunts of man (or god), and nearly always close to Ocean. Therefore it is feasible to consider that the Sirens' own meadow, despite the poet's failure to elaborate on the idea, adjoins a beach that is also the shore of Ocean. This conclusion would draw the island of the enchantresses into the thematic orbit of other places of transition, those axial or omphalic locations characterised by exceptional fertility.

The true puzzle is why the fertile meadow should be a characteristic of both an Underworld landscape and the home of a death-dealing Siren in the higher skies, as well as the idyllic lands occupied by divinities and a few favoured mortals such as Menelaos. The solution proposed here is admittedly speculative, but in the absence of clear Homeric proof I suggest that the Heavenly and Hadean forms of the 'fertile place' are set in meaningful apposition because they are *vertically aligned.* Extreme fertility can, and so often does, represent the regenerative power that flows through the *axis*, not only along the vertical path but horizontally, hence diffusing through the three planes from the centre of each. Thus, the flowering meadows can be considered as *omphalos*-points in the planes of Heaven, Earth and Hades respectively where the *axis* begins, penetrates and ends, but in every case emits the creative force throughout the plane. We have, after all, an awareness of the Golden Chain of Homer's deities, the 'falling anvil' of Hesiod and possibly Mt. Olympos "common to all" as allomorphs of the essential *axis* which passes through, or joins, the planes' three centres to unite them. To achieve the act of binding implicit in the imagery of the Golden Chain, the Chain as *axis* must pierce the plane at the *omphalos*-points. As a result, the blessings of Heaven will be transmitted horizontally through all three locations, leading to exceptional fertility around these points of penetration. Whether spoken of as 'flowery meadows', 'fields of asphodel' or 'gardens of abundance', the fertile places correspond closely to some we have yet to meet:

at the height: Mount Ida; the Isles of the Blessed; the northern islands of the Sirens; the gardens of Alkinoös;
on the Earth plane: the banks of Skamandros; the flowery garden of young Persephone;
in the Underworld: close to the gates of Helios the Sun, perhaps the same 'field of asphodel' later the destination of Achilleus (24, 13; 11, 439); the cavern of Kalypso.

When the magical garden appears in the *Homeric Hymns*, it is situated on the Earth plane but acts as a doorway to the Underworld.

Persephone's Playground

In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (17f.) Persephone is to be found playing happily with her young companions, "gathering flowers, roses and crocuses / and beautiful violets in a soft meadow" up to the moment of her seizure by the god of Hades, "Receiver of Many".[4] The traditional attribution (by the historian Diodorus) which places Persephone's garden at Enna in the geographic centre of Sicily may be no more than a Sicilian's pride in his homeland, but it effectively confirms the notion of the meadow (and entrance to Hades) as a marker of the *omphalos*-centre. (Enna survives to this day as a small town not far from the great volcanic mountain of Etna). The *Hymn* speaks of a paradisal location where Persephone reaches out her hand to take a wondrous, hundred-headed narcissus growing there, which was to be her final action before she was forcibly carried off to the Underworld through a hole in the ground at this very spot. In this instance, the narcissus flower is the very model of the plant of abundance and immortality, or the 'up-lifting' Tree of Life which stands rooted at the Centre of the World. The plant is denied her, and so too is immortality. The meadow which offered such tempting beauty was a marker of the life-or-death place, but the magical plant reveals the presence of a great force for life.

The Persephone legend is important to the interpretation of the *Odyssey*'s entrance to Hades, since the vegetation myth was so very ancient; the poet's allusion to "the grove of Persephone" in his definition of the entrance would have evoked a wide range of associated memories in the mind of his audience, not least the magical flower which intimates the Tree of Life. The sheer volume and beauty of the flowering plants described in the *Homeric Hymn* and in his account by Diodorus, their size and unusual formation, proves the existence of water at this site, which was moreover identified with the centre of (triangular) Sicily at Enna.

Perhaps the same conditions apply to the Sirens' meadow, where a bone-littered ground lies next to a flowering garden. In later myth, the Sirens were cast by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (5.552ff.) as some of those former companions of Persephone who played with her in her garden of flowers. Perhaps one meadow was occasionally identified with another on the basis of some common denominator.

Placing the Sirens

To date, we have argued for a heroic journey which progresses around the ecliptic circle and only deviates from it to venture along the axial line. If the Sirens are to take up their place *in sequence* (which is a most important point in this argument) that place should be due north, following the Laistrygonian appearance at the north-west quarter where the narrative was broken off for the visit to Circe; and north, we have observed, is a sacred direction in that it is the stepping-off place to the higher spheres, from terrestrial to celestial: icy Arctic to heavenly Hyperborea or polar Mount Meru to the North Pole Star. Nevertheless there are strongly mitigating factors indicating that the Sirens do indeed appear as northerly guardians, despite their lack of divine graces.

As an extension of terrestrial north, the Sirens' island lies 'across the circle' from the Lotus Eaters in the south, as previously noted. Herein lies a perfect match between the 'forgetting' characterised by the consumption of a narcotic herb and the all-embracing knowledge which is the Sirens' to bestow, "everything that happens" (191). The hero's fabled curiosity (as exhibited on the island of the Cyclops) does not extend to acceptance of this remarkable offer. It would appear that the type of 'knowing' offered by the Sirens is not of the correct nature to detain Odysseus, for as the reader or listener may be aware and the hero has been warned, it surely leads to 'death'. This is the all too obvious message of the bones on the shore.

Are we to understand that he is seeking a different category of knowledge, one which leads to 'life' of another order, or the renewal of his present existence? If so, that life is identified by him with Penelope and the island of Ithaka. *Nostos* is the key word and the battle cry.

The Song and the Singer

Odysseus has already encountered one articulate, singing goddess, Circe, and is to meet another in the person of Kalypso. The magical power of song is a *leitmotiv* inviting the audience to consider the invisible bonds

which unite the various songsters, of whom two groups (Sirens and Circe) are potentially bad and the other (Kalypso) who, although possessive, proves kindlier in helping the hero onwards towards the next stage of his journey. The Sirens and Circe, too, are creatures of the north, whilst the Lotophagoi and Kalypso belong in the southern hemisphere. Strange as it may at first seem, the south in its chilly association with the low Sun of the winter solstice is the region of most promise. The high Sun can be scorching and destructive; it is the winter Sun that urges the crops into life and begins the cycle of renewal. As this story advances, it will become clear that Homer's north is an unfavourable direction and location, until the moment when the traveller succeeds in breaking through to those higher reaches associated with an area of cosmic sea 'beyond the Sun' where we shall locate Scheria and Ithaka. The final phase of his transformation will begin 'underground' or in the south, following the rising path of the Sun as it carries spring into summer.

A Siren Doorway*?*

A final consideration: how many Sirens are we to suppose? Homer does not say, and their mythic history gives no clear answer, but it may be tentatively assumed that the "echoing" sounds (23, 326) are passing from one to the other. Two Sirens would give a match to two other twin singers, Circe and Kalypso, whose golden shuttle seems to fly between them in a similar model of reciprocation. Two Sirens would do even more: it would suppose that the figures could be perched on separate, jutting cliffs above their beach, despite 12, 45 ("sitting in their meadow") watching for passing approaching sailors to entrap, just as in some early pictorial versions of the story two Siren-birds sit atop two cliffs.[5] Even if the 'rocks' are nothing more than necessary supports, they still create a gateway.

In the identification in this art work of at least two Sirens with two cliffs there is a hint that the creatures could be viewed as portal guardians like many another island dweller portrayed in the Apologue**.** If so, the poet has created a consistent series of cosmic portals that extend from the Cyclops to the second appearance of Skylla-Charybdis, and one which is only interrupted by the journey to Circe, Hades, and return to Circe. The latter, as we have established, is an incursion on to the *axis,* along a similar linear connection to that connecting the forgetful Lotus Eaters to the all-knowing Sirens of the skyward north.

The Windless Island

Concerning "the windless calm" which is a feature of the northern island of the Sirens, Merry and Riddell were moved to comment that the lack of wind was in itself a token of otherworldliness in a location beyond the Earth's atmosphere.[6] This has a definite ring of truth. If at some stage there were two Sirens perched on two cliffs as we have imagined, and that this was the underlying image in the mind of the poet, the Siren episode would conform to other episodes featuring gateways formed from cliffs, moving or clashing rocks, or the space between islands. All the portals identified to date, including here at the Sirens' homeland, are characterised by this supernatural calm, even including Hades itself, which the sailors departed "rowing at first, but *after that* on a fair wind following" (11, 640, emphasis added). A 'windless calm' associated with supernatural places would also help to explain why Charon regularly uses a pole to punt the departed across the rivers of the Underworld, and why Gilgamesh seeking the mystic world of Utnapishtim was similarly forced to cut and use three hundred punting poles to cross the ocean.[7]

A record in an Egyptian *Book of the Dead* quoted by Wallis Budge[8] refers to the Underworld as a place 'without air'. The meaning is esoteric: the gods all breathed divine *Ma'at* which permeated the universe, but the human soul is not divine. If there is no wind near Hades or the home of the Sirens, it is because they are very much 'of the gods'. To date, the travellers have found a calm sea and safe entry into harbour in every place they have visited and were even guided in a few cases by "some god", so a lack of wind on the approach to the Sirens is therefore confirmed as part of a series of similar locations having in common some preternatural stillness. It may be that their association with the north draws them into the same spectrum as the Underworld place where no breath of useful air guides the ship of the soul.

That is not to say that 'stillness' indicates that all the sailors' visits will be uneventful, but we note that their departures from Aiolia and Thrinakia will be beset by stormy winds entirely as the result of their own human folly. It may be believed that the 'calm' has less to do with the eventual fate of the sailors and more to do with a timeless condition peculiar to the location which would remove any likelihood of variability. Of this, there will be much more to say when we arrive in the land of the Phaiakians where time takes on an unearthly quality. Scheria, as we shall see, also has a particular connection with the 'high north'.

From this point on and having left the fatal island behind him, wherever Odysseus now sails with his men the road must lead to the east

and the south. He will engage with more trials and dangers and progressive isolation from his fellow man, but he will at last be voyaging through the area of the rising Sun's most potent area of influence.

Skylla and Charybdis (North-East; Summer solstice: 12, 55-126; 234-25; 429-446)

The rocks which Circe describes as "the Rovers" act as clashing doors to any man, bird or ship foolhardy enough to attempt passage through the sharp cliffs, waves, and "ravening fire" which characterise them. Divine intervention such as that granted by Hera to Jason and his Argonauts in a similar encounter is the only manner by which passage is achieved. Of the two rocky islands, Skylla is marked by a great column pierced by a cave where the six-headed monster lies in wait to devour the luckless traveller (73-100); "the other cliff (on Charybdis) is lower" (101) but only an arrow cast away. Its features are a fig tree below which an equally voracious whirlpool swallows and regurgitates thrice daily, "[boiling] up in turbulence", like a cauldron over a fire (235-239). The two have in common their cliffs and their fire, their flying spray, and their affinity with 'swallowing'. But only Charybdis "vomits up", and therein lies the difference which points to separate paths, 'up' and 'down'.

The Rovers or the Planktai are a prime example of the Active Door motif of great antiquity and wide distribution.[9] The door *must* guard and menace because it gives access to that life-giving source, which is so often the object of a heroic quest. Islands, cliffs, mountains, knives, 'dancing reeds', razor-edged door leaves all conspire to defeat the unwary or unworthy. Homer's Skylla and Charybdis are no exception, forming as they do one of the most dangerous of the series of doorways faced by the hero, who (with luck and good judgment) will have the resource to execute the 'Open Sesame' formula. Like the dangerous passage between Cyclops' island and Goat Island, the passage between Laistrygonian promontories (both marked by flying stones) and the fatal waters lying between two possible Sirens on two cliffs, this is yet another perilous passageway to be overcome.

Such paired doorposts or their substitutes are pairs of opposites, not merely 'confronted' but contrary. Thus it proves with Homer's rocks, one of which indicates great height, and the other, great depth. One is distinguished by a cave, the other by a whirlpool, but both provide *omphalos* forms exercising a 'transitional' function, as we shall see. The great height of Skylla's column is matched by a lesser vertical, a fig tree,

but both are axial forms. As a consequence, each 'leaf of the door' offers a 'way up' and a 'way down'. An entire dialogue of cosmic dimensions is buried in this homology of column and cave, tree and whirlpool, which need to be considered in their individual functions before they can be placed in context. Skylla dominates in Circe's first mention of the two rocks (73-100), in their first appearance after the episode of the Sirens. Charybdis is the focus of interest of the later episode (429-446) which follows the visit to the island of the Cattle of the Sun, by which time Odysseus is the lone survivor of a fearful storm.

It has to be wondered why the hazards of Skylla and Charybdis were imposed upon the hero and his companions, when a common sense narrative would suggest avoiding them entirely. Odysseus (or Homer) has already used the 'curiosity motif' on the visit to the one-eyed giant in his cave but no such plausible excuse is offered on this occasion. The clashing or swallowing rocks have to be faced (Circe has made this clear) and the choice is limited to one of two hazards, though both will finally have to be addressed. A metaphysical answer is the only appropriate response to the difficulties inherent in the episode. The way forward requires a doorway, and passage into the space beyond requires the sailor to face it head on, at 90 degrees or so to the construct, that is to say, across the 180 degrees of the threshold line, hence along the *axis mundi*. Avoidance or turning aside will not allow passage through to the inner realm symbolised by the door. In accepting the challenges of the monstrous gateway Odysseus is implicitly accepting the cosmic elements of the initiatory journey.

Again, it is difficult to know why the dangerous rocks feature twice, and why the poet chose to send his hero *back* to a location already featured, with its full complement of deaths and disaster. But the same reversal occurred in the west (Aiolia to Ithaka and back to Aiolia) and in the Circe-to-Hades episodes (Circe to Hades, Hades to Circe). The answer in the case of Skylla and Charybdis lies in the contrary directions indicated by the two islands. In the solar order and moving eastwards, the rocks stand at the north-east position, the summer solstice place "where the Sun makes its turnings" and the point of appearance of the summer Sun at dawn. Skylla, pointing 'up', is an *axis* image, a pillar of the sky (World Pillar) which invites us, learning of the difficulty in climbing its steep, polished sides, to imagine a difficult ascent to the heavens. The rock (Skylla) is doubly insurmountable because she reaches up to Heaven, to dark cloud, and into a profound darkness apparently *beyond the Sun*: "Nor does the sunlight ever hold that peak" (75f.) at any time of the summer. This is a 'Heaven-reaching' *axis*, akin to the 'heaven-reaching' tree on Kalypso's island and the fig on Charybdis. Nevertheless, Skylla carries

within her body the *omphalos* cave, here a 'belly' halfway along her length so definitely at navel-point, into which her victims will fall, that is, in 'downward movement'. It is no wonder that Skylla's cave is "misty-looking" and "turned towards Erebos and the dark" (12, 80f.), for the descent in question is into the mouth of the stomach-cave and into its black depths, equally the Underworld night associated with the descent of the Sun into the west and under the Earth.[10] Like the Cyclops' cave, the Laistrygonian harbour, and the 'vomiting stomach' of Charybdis' whirlpool, this is a death place where yet more hapless sailors will be 'eaten' or 'swallowed'. A totally unheroic life's ending for those less percipient than their master.

When Odysseus has evaded the "evil monster' and survived a tempest after the following adventure, he will come again to Charybdis which marks the lowest point of the solar cycle at the winter solstice ('south-east'). Equally deadly, in the view of Circe *more* deadly than Skylla, Charybdis indicates the 'way down' into the sand-black bottom of the sea (243f.). And yet, just as one could pass down *into* Skylla (without mention of return), one could be passed *up* from Charybdis if one caught her on the moment of change. There is a nearby fig tree offering safety and indicating the route of ascent. Therefore both rocks carry markers of 'passage down' for the hapless men who encounter them, or 'passage down *and* up' in the case of Charybdis, at the same time as representing the great difficulty of 'passing through'. In the final analysis, the two separate episodes involving Skylla and Charybdis are distinguished by an emphasis in the first on the negative role of Skylla, and at the reprise, on the positive function of the whirlpool island of Charybdis.

Here separately are the two routes, paths or ways which the soul is so often required to consider. Having chosen to pass through the door, will the soul take the right or wrong path: the one which leads to redemption or immortal life, or the other, to metempsychosis or perdition? Circe has already pointed out to Odysseus that he will be required to make choices (12, 56ff.). The two-way movement embedded in both outer forms of Skylla and Charybdis speaks of passage in either direction along the spiritual *axis*, which is one of the pillars of the world. Conceivably, the way up is most to be desired, but as events are to prove, the beginning of the path for Odysseus begins in the sea, continues to the rock of Charybdis and concludes in the island cave of Kalypso, where is found the *omphalo*s in the depths of the sea (1, 52).

The first agent of his 'elevation' is to be the fig tree which hangs over the depths of the whirlpool and which saves his life in the physical sense, when he reaches up to take hold of its branches. As an axial indicator, the

fig is the Tree of Life which performs the same function as the world pillar. But first, there is the Island of the Sun to be met and understood.

Thrinakia, Helios and the Cattle of the Sun (East; equinoctial: 12, 260-402)

The Thrinakian debacle which was first mentioned in the proem of the *Odyssey* (1, 6-9) must be considered critical to the story to follow, if this pre-eminence is the work of the poet. At stake is a battle between man and Sun which understandably ends in disaster for the companions when a contract in the form of a solemn oath is ruptured by the egotistical behaviour of the crew. Disobedience, indifference, stupidity, call it what one will, they have failed to hold to their instructions ('remembering') and this was to be the ultimately cause of their death. The solar contract is not to be challenged but complied with as an immutable law, for to destabilise the Sun is also to shatter the flow of Time and to disturb the productive cycle of the seasons. Helios' threat to "go down to Hades and give [his] light to the dead men" (383) amounts precisely to this: the Sungod will remove his favours from the Earth and leave the living men in barren darkness. The threat is not beyond imagining, for in the west where we have placed the island paired with eastern Thrinakia (Aiolia) the Sun does precisely what Helios is threatening: he daily descends below the horizon into the unknown country of the night.

So far in the story Odysseus has resisted the lure of 'time-denying' pleasures offered by the food of the Lotus Eaters, the drugs of Circe and the knowledge of past and future which lay in the power of the Sirens to give, and holding fast to the future event (his *nostos*) remains securely within the Circle of Time which will carry him home. If he were to forget that homecoming, he would lose the one moment which defines his essential being: he would lose *himself* by the rules of a system which equates life with the Sun. But once again the resolution of his journey suffers a setback through no fault of his own.

Thrinakia is the most overtly solar of the islands and ultimately the most costly in human life. Since it is Helios, the Sun, who eases the troubles of man and "brings joy to mortals" (269) whilst providing warmth to foster plant and animal life on Earth, this land should be revered and respected by all. Unfortunately his companions overrule their master in slaughtering the sacred cattle, so the disaster predicted by Teiresias comes fatally to pass. The companions perish when at last they entrust their craft to a calm sea after weeks of confinement on the island (325; 397-400). But

Zeus, hearing the plea of Helios, sends his mighty storm winds to bring about their destruction.

But it is too early yet to abandon the island of Helios and his cattle. Thrinakia offers a model of an ideal fertile country blessed by the gods.

Harbour and Cave

Little is said of the geographical features of this island where the cattle are the main focus of interest. Yet there is a "hollow harbour, close to sweet water" (12, 305f.) and a "hollow sea cave" (317f.) where the sailors drag their "hollow ship" (310) when the storm strikes (316-318). So many 'hollows'- the reader is perhaps being directed towards memories of other 'hollows' that proved to be less than sheltering: caves of cannibals, the drug parlour of a witch, or a harbour where they were speared like fish. Having been so prompted, we are ready for the Thrinakian cave which might have been a doublet of the Cyclopean cave and the Laistrygonian harbour, given the savagery of the fate soon to be meted out to the sacrilegious sailors, but instead looks forward to the serene beauty of an utterly different Cave of the Nymphs on Ithaka. Here on Thrinakia, too, "nymphs" enjoy "their beautiful dancing places and sessions" (318) whereas on Odysseus' home island they weave their sea-purple webs across their looms. Both caves are provided with a water supply, "ever flowing" on Ithaka, "sweet" on Thrinakia. The chosen scheme has already given the impression that Ithaka, with its own nymph-cave, must lie east of Aiolia, the western isle. So it is most appropriate that the easterly equivalent is also thematically linked (via respective caves with nymphs) to Ithaka, and situated by geographical apposition to the final destination of Odysseus. If Aiolia and Thrinakia mark the extreme west and east, then by implication Ithaka lies centrally between the two. (But it must be remembered that three or four dimensions are at stake: the centrality in question may lie far from the plane of the Earth).

There are further thematic ties between east and centre. The hero slept on this island after praying to the gods (notably in a 'windless' place, perhaps one suited to a god's presence? away from his companions, 333-337) and he slept also on the approach to Ithaka after his ill-starred encounter with the king of Aiolia (10, 31) in the western quarter at an earlier stage of the journey. And the ill-judged consumption of cattle has its own counterpart in the thoughtless behaviour of Penelope's suitors in consuming the Ithakan herds belonging to Odysseus. All these correspondences create a bond between Aiolia, Ithaka and Thrinakia

which establishes them on a horizontal, equinoctial line linking west, to centre, to east.

The Calendar

Number symbolism, too, links Thrinakia with Aiolia. We have already spoken of the 'calendrical' disposition of the children of Aiolos in the bedrooms of the king's palace. Here, on the Island of the Sun, are pastured seven herds of oxen and seven herds of sheep, fifty beasts in each. Since they (magically and timelessly) never die or give birth, their numbers remain constant (just like the doves crushed by the Planktai, whom Zeus always replaces, and the death-defying population of Delos under the patronage of Apollo and Hyperborea). Number seven is appropriately sacred to Apollo the Sungod (who must be relevant to this island as solar territory) and whose feast day was traditionally celebrated on the seventh day of each month.[11] Now, seven times fifty gives 350, which is the closest possible integer to the 354 days of the lunar calendar; therefore two herds will give 2 x 350; or two lunar years. It will be remembered, also, that in his circular enclosure ("full circle") Eumaios the worthy swineherd kept his 350 sows in twelve separate pens, constituting twelve lunar months of 29-30 days; and that the boars which lay outside the circle were 360 in number, the degrees of that circle. For the "four dogs" watching over them (14, 9-22) there are numerous candidates: solstices and equinoxes, cardinal directions, or seasons, which are not necessarily distinguishable one from the other, since Sun, Time and Place are implicated in all four.

Archaeology can offer supporting evidence for early calendrical time-keeping in the form of a remarkable ancient artefact found in Crete.

An Ancient Minoan Calendar

A new interpretation of a 'game board' known as the 'Minoan Abacus' discovered in the ruins of Knossos [12] proposes this as a working calendar, the oldest in the world if the identification is correct. Pawns found nearby acted as markers charting the passage of time across the ornamental, lunisolar layout (Moon + Sun) of the board. This ancient calendar combines lunar and solar systems in one instrument, the basis being a nine-day week giving a thirty-six day month, ten months to a year. That is, 4 x 9 = 36; 36 x 10 = 360 days in the solar year, needing 5.2 days to be adjusted. The board could mark time across four full years.[13]

This is all of particular interest in the light of Homer's reference (19, 178f.) to 'Minos Enneoros' who ruled at Knossos for nine year periods (before presumably renewing his kingship by ritual means, possibly with solar reference). An interesting hypothesis proposing that the entire *Odyssey* has been constructed around lunar-solar calendrical information has been put forward by the joint authors of *Homer's Secret Iliad* (1999), Kenneth and Florence Wood. Their more recent work on *Homer's Secret Odyssey* (2011) allocates lunar calendrical positions to each of the Adventures on the basis of a close reading of the number symbolism incorporated in leading episodes.

With Thrinakia and the pigsty of Eumaios pointing to a lunar system of time-keeping (base 7) and the nine-year reign of the king of Knossos hinting at a system based on a solar calendar (base 9), the evidence from Crete of a lunisolar model combining both systems of time measurement (7 and 9) is some confirmation of a calendrical intention on the part of the poet who gives such a neat disposition of sundry flocks and herds, of whom the white sheep may be symbols of the Moon, or the night, and the cattle, appropriately, of the Sun or the day. The overriding impression of the solar island of Helios is one of regularity and order, immutability too, or timelessness, since the animals never die. Aiolia is the same, apart from the uncertain temper of its king. From this circumstance it can be understood that east and west are the bedrock of the system, the associated places of rising and setting which mark the beginning and end of the day. They are also the places linked with the equinoctial midpoints between solstices. In a perfectly ordered world, the ecliptic of the Sun would coincide permanently with the celestial equator of the Earth, for the resulting solar constancy (no extremes of weather, no fluctuation in animal or crop production) would guarantee a far easier life for man, possibly without toil or ageing. These are recognisably features ascribed in the epics to Olympos and Elysium, and may account for other mythic allocations of paradise islands and gardens in extreme east and west: Eden, for one, or Atlantis, or the Isles of the Blessed.

If Odysseus and his companions failed to 'break out of the circle' at west and east, they have missed very great opportunities through their disobedience, or in the case of Odysseus, with allowing sleep to dull the senses. Both are unforgivable forms of 'forgetting'. It has already been remarked that in Indic tradition and elsewhere in traditional societies, dawn and dusk are the prime times for giving sacrifice and offering oneself up to the gods, for they are the 'between' times (neither day nor night) when the solar gates open, and one may pass through in spirit. On Aeolia, the companions' ship was so near to their home on Ithaka, and

later too, when comfortably harboured on the island of Helios "which brings joy to mortals" (269), but the sailors failed to take advantage of the opportunity; worse still, they gave deep offence to the king in the west *and* to the god in the east whom they should have respected. Even their sacrifice is sub-standard, in the absence of white barley and wine to honour the gods as tradition demanded. Instead, they were forced to use leaves and water, which have funerary associations well suited to their present doom-laden circumstances.

Across the Solar Threshold, to Climb the Tree

Coomaraswamy has explored both the Eastern and European contexts of the many 'doors in the sky' defining the 'way beyond' which appear in world literature. In a long essay, *Janua Coeli*, he cited Vedic, Christian and Islamic, Chinese and Egyptian variants of the same idea.[14] The aim of the Vedic sacrificer, he says, the man who offers himself at dawn or dusk, is to travel in spirit along the rays of the Sun, through the gateway, and by the direction of his mind, arrive at the Sun itself.[15] 'Under the Sun' in the land of shadows all is mortal; above and beyond lies immortality. The way there is conceived in shamanistic style as a tree-climbing exercise leading along an *axis mundi* or Sun pillar, sacrificial post or Tree of Life, all, whatever their form, rooted in the navel of the Earth. It is as a tree-pillar of this kind that we must eventually analyse the fig tree flourishing on Charybdis' isle, close to the whirlpool vortex or 'mouth of Hades'.

Skylla and Charybdis (South-East; Winter solstice: 12, 55-110; 426-446)

One inevitable consequence of imposing a circular journey upon the *Apologoi* is the possibility of being hard-pressed to explain one or more of the allocations. To date, the sequence has fallen quite comfortably into place on the basis of cogent oppositions and factors relevant to solar time and place. At this point however the purpose of Odysseus' enforced return to Skylla and Charybdis ("I must measure the whole way back" 428) is enigmatic. Back he must go, and the poet is clear on this point: there is unfinished business with Charybdis who was, as it were, left in the wings while the avaricious Skylla did her worst the first time round. The hero's improvised craft is borne on the South Wind (427) until at dawn it reaches the site of the terrible rock and the swallowing whirlpool. Two possible explanations come to mind: not the hero, but the Sun has moved, taking its double-doored solar gateway to a different point in the cycle, implying

that the 'return to Skylla-Charybdis' would be a matter of time, not place. Alternatively, it may be that the poet is subjecting his leading character to another of those troublesome reverses of direction which occurred after the visits to Aiolia (west-east-west) and Circe (north-south-north). No spiritual progress is without its setbacks and reversals which test the true mettle of the soul, and events on Thrinakia imply human unworthiness.

It was suggested that the first episode involving Skylla and Charybdis identified the morning position of the summer solstice, that is, the north-east before the midday zenith is reached. This subsequent reprise of the Skylla-Charybdis is (to adopt our first theory) most likely an indication of the lower terminus of the Sun's course at the winter solstice, and would explain what seems to be an untypical return to a place already visited. Time has passed, the Sun is rising in a lower quarter, and the season is moving towards a winter phase which will carry the hero towards the nadir of his circular journey. Odysseus goes back in the sense that he revisits a known feature to experience it in a different aspect, namely by engaging with the salvific fig tree rather than the death-dealing rock of Skylla.

To recap from the earlier episode: the high tower of Skylla's rock points heavenwards, but Charybdis' whirlpool sucks down into the watery depths of the sea. Skylla for all her cannibalistic manners typifies the rising direction but contains the danger of reversal, while the whirlpool indicates descent in the first instance but a potential for ascent at the moment of regurgitation. At this stage, descent is still the direction of Odysseus' journey and a necessary phase in the evolution of the soul, as we shall see. The threatening rocks offer two directions of transit, though both possibilities are built into each jamb of this challenging gateway. The oppositional analogue is complemented by the swallowing mouth of Skylla's cave ('down') and the projectile habits of the greedy whirlpool ('up'), both images being centred upon mouth and belly and recalling the process of consumption. As a secondary effect, listener and reader may be reminded of those irreligious and unsociable eating habits already displayed in other locations and presented as paradigms of ill-behaviour and disrespect to the gods. Social correctness (*xenia*) exemplifies social customs by which a cosmically-balanced society may be maintained, and nowhere is the contrast between social and antisocial consumption of meat, equally the food of prayer and sacrifice, made clearer than on central Ithaka.

In next chapter we shall consider how Circe and Kalypso as the guardians of the paths to Hades or heavenly Scheria exemplify 'the way down' and 'the way up' respectively. In the episodes involving the clashing or (in this last case) the unmoving rocks, Odysseus has been

tracing the course of a solar journey which had the potential to lift him up and allow him passage into the *aither*. As is his custom, Homer is anticipating and pulling together the threads of Time. His Rovers or Planktai are not precisely those of the *Argonautica*,[16] but they are brought into the symbolic field by Circe's evocation of the well-known story. No dove loses his tail in the course of Odysseus' encounter, because Skylla and Charybdis do not close together; but earlier, in escaping the boulders thrown by Polyphemos, the ship came very close to losing its steering oar at the rear (essentially 'its tail') as the sailors fled from the Cyclops (9, 537-541). The motif hovers in the background to maintain the subtle connection of south-western Cyclops-land with north-eastern Skylla-Charybdis, a diagonal linking the high and low solstice points, which is matched by the ties between the north-west Laistrygonian island and the south-east repetition of Skylla-Charybdis.

The latter island introduces the reader to one of Homer's most powerful images, an echo of the olive-tree bedpost of Ithaka.

The Tree

The fig tree which plays such a crucial part in preserving Odysseus from total annihilation in the dark maw of Charybdis has some curious features which call out for explanation. The hero has come to the island for the second time, but on this occasion *out of the darkness* ("all that night") and *at the rising of the Sun* (429), the mystical time which is neither night nor day. (It is very much another example of moments when the "courses of night and day" run close together). There he finds an eddying 'navel of the sea' to match the *omphalos* on Kalypso's island, which he is fast approaching. The fig provides the *axis* element which always accompanies the *omphalos*-receptor, as it did with Skylla's pillar-plus-cave, and will do again when the returning hero lands on Ithaka in the Bay of Phorkys (13, 96-101).

There on his home island, between the embracing arms of two promontories which shelter the harbour (repetition of the door motif and evoking the Laistrygonian harbour) stands "an olive tree with spreading leaves" (102f.). Nearby lies the wondrous Cave of the Nymphs but also, visible from afar, the mountain Neritos "all covered in forest" (13, 351). In this concatenation of double *omphalos* symbols (harbour and cave) and adjacent axial verticals (tree and mountain) we have the same configuration as found on Charybdis with her neighbouring whirlpool. But in the present episode it is the seemingly humble fig which will preserve

the physical life of the hero at the same time as it enables him to continue his spiritual journey.

The Tree of Salvation

Odysseus is fortunate that at the moment when Charybdis begins to suck *down*, he is able to reach *up* and grasp an overhanging branch of the leafy, long-branched fig (12, 431f.) There he clings and hangs like a bat, having no foothold nor any chance of climbing safely into its branches, "for", he says, "the roots of it were far from me" (435). This is confusing on many fronts. Obviously Charybdis and her tree are higher than the sea and the whirlpool she overhangs, so reaching up as the hero does is a necessary move. And yet once established on the branch he has been able to seize, he finds himself at a considerable distance from the roots which one may assume to begin at ground level. Once there, he hangs "like a bat" (433). How can this be? A bat hangs by his toes, head downwards. The prospect of an Achaian warrior behaving like a bat is ludicrous to contemplate. On the other hand, Odysseus has at other times been the subject of various time-reversing or 'upside-down' similes in which he appeared as a child (5, 394-358) or changed roles with his wife, she replacing Odysseus as the shipwrecked swimmer (23, 233-239); so are we perhaps dealing with another 'reverse' simile, not this time of age or gender, but of position? Those roots, for example: the phrase "*Rhizoi gar hekas eichon*" does indeed give 'roots far away' but not necessarily far *below*; that is a translation predicated on common knowledge that roots are generally lower than branches. The alternative meaning, 'far away' but not 'below' opens the possibility that not Odysseus, but the *tree* is inverted, and that its roots are indeed far away, but *above.*

This is not as preposterous as it may at first seem. Whilst the inverted tree is a very common folklore motif in India, the Near East and Europe, the Vedic version certainly predated the Epic appearance, and the inverted tree is no more unexpected than the inverted mountain of Meru, which we have already encountered. Both tree and mountain interpret, quite simply, 'divine rootedness in Heaven', or the 'downward flow' along the most beneficial path. The iconographic record is informative here. An Indus Valley seal from the third millennium BCE[17] (figure X1-7) presents a hierarchic arrangement of fig leaves, central *axis* or trunk mounted on a solar disk. It has two 'guardian' dragon heads, confronted, which frame and protect the tree, the centre and a solar disk, in the manner of a gateway. This is an image placing the fig in the cosmic role of *axis* of Heaven, or Tree of Life. It is possible to see this *axis* in a central upright

tipped with a leaf-like point, like a lance or spear; eight further leaves attached to it indicate eight directions. Therefore the number of references contained in one compound image indicate that this particular tree is functioning in a wider role, namely as a cosmogram, but with a focus on a 'spiritual' division of space.

The well-known sacred tree of India is the fig known as *ficus religiosa*, *asvattha* or *pipal* tree. *Asvattha* derives from *vatam*, rope or cord, or *Vata,* fig tree; Dravidian *vata* refers also to the north.[18] So here we find a '[fig-] tree of the north' which is certainly the northern *axis*-tree under another name. The *pipal*, still revered to this day, is an epiphyte which grows on other trees until big enough to develop roots of its own, eventually attaining a height of over ninety feet. Instead of hiding underground, these roots must branch down from above (where the seed had first implanted itself on the host tree) until they touch land. They would indeed be very large, in time.

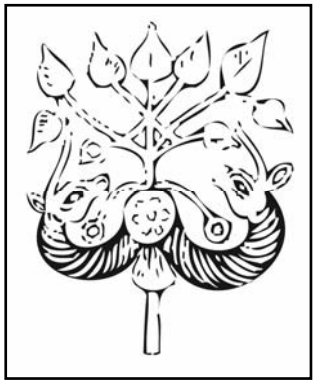

Figure XI-17

In ancient metaphor, the sacred fig with 'branches below and roots above' serves as an exemplar of divine and cosmic structure. To the Vedic thinker it represents 'mind, or 'knowledge' in so far as every leaf corresponds to the words of the ancient and unchangeable *Vedas*. This riddling, cryptic form of discourse is not peculiar to India. Maryanne Horowitz[19] has written of such complex imagery under the evocative title 'Tree at the Centre and the Indo-European and Hebraic Image of Mind Growing as Plant', in which she reviews the 'cosmic' trees of several cultures, finding a pattern of worldwide analogies linking plant growth with culture and human consciousness. So in view of this universalism and

Homer's frequent use of tree and leaf imagery in the context of fallen warriors, this should be a profitable avenue to pursue. In his *Timaeus*, Plato, also, preserves the analogy when he says "we are a plant not of an earthly but of a heavenly growth", for our 'roots' are located in our souls; and "the divine power suspended the head and the root of us from that place where the generation of the soul first began".[20]

A translation of *Rg Veda,* 10. 27. 14, by Murray Fowler (1947) describes the sacred fig as "great (or high), shadeless, leafless *steed*". Anyone familiar with the Norse tree of Odin, 'Yggdrasil' the World Tree, will recognise the *asvattha* tradition. 'Ygg' is one of Odin's names, and 'drasil' is 'horse'. The inner sense is the Tree of Life as a vehicle of a great god, the tree that he 'rides' like a mounted warrior (and as Odysseus 'rides' his fractured mast-tree). That either the tree or the horse should be 'shadeless' is a reflection of its immortal, incorporeal essence, claims Fowler. It is a feature already discussed in these pages as a marker of the timeless place. The Indic predecessor, *asvattha,* contains the spirit of the god Agni, as 'fire latent in the wood'; and a divine spirit will cast no light; but from the broad spectrum of cases where no shadow is cast one learns that such an absence indicates an imperishable, timeless place or condition.

The 'upside down tree' expresses a profound identity between man and cosmos. The foundation of that principle ('sameness', or 'identity with') is the wisdom of self-knowledge. The world of man constitutes a round of birth, death, and rebirth characterised by sorrow and age, yet 'out there and beyond' lies the Ultimate Reality known in Indic tradition as Brahman. In their suffering many will aspire to detach the Self from its imprisoned condition and by detachment, to merge with the Ultimate. The way there is through knowledge, and the cosmic tree provides a stable model of the route to be followed by the aspirant.

The Tree of Life figures in other traditions such as the ancient Tarot as a location for the motif of 'the hanging man', while Norse tradition also preserves a memory of the great god Odin hanging on a tree. Such trees not infrequently hang over a whirlpool which is the entrance to an Otherworld.[21] In the Near East, hanging from a tree was a prelude to return to life, precisely as one finds Odysseus suspended over the abyss at this stage of his journey. Once again, Sumerian literature provides a precedent in the *Descent of Inanna to Hell*. The goddess put on all the trappings of monarchy and left her great cities to make a descent through the seven gates which lay between her country and the Underworld. At each gate she shed more of her queenly paraphernalia until at last she stood naked before the Queen of the Dead. (This is 'divestiture' as the renunciation of 'Self'). At this point she becomes a putrefying corpse which is hung on a peg on

the wall. There she remains for three days and nights and will only be rescued ('reincarnated'), when Enki sends her the food and water of life. Like Odysseus, she has been stripped of her identity. Odysseus too, will suffer the same divestiture and asocial nakedness, even it is hinted, to the extent of being flayed of his skin like an octopus as he is washed up on the shore of the Phaiakian island, and even more forcefully when he later opts to wear the low-status clothing of a beggar.

The inclusion of the fig in the topography of Charybdis and the topic of inversion ('over-turning' or 'right versus wrong' direction) is all part of Homer's inter-related symbolism of trees and wooden instruments of power. This fig provides the key which will eventually unlock the great mystery awaiting the hero's return to Ithaka: that sacred olive rooted in the very centre of the marital bedchamber which will cause the hero such anxiety in days to come.

The most useful fact to bear in mind as we leave the ecliptic journey and move towards the linear connection between Kalypso and Circe and other 'northern' territories, is that the tree, in any culture of which traditions are preserved, can represent the Milky Way (or Way as *axis*) which periodically divides the heavens from Gemini to Sagittarius. That whirlpool lying at its foot is no other than the turbulent meeting of the two arms of the Way, or in Homeric terms, the confluence of "thunderous" rivers. In the case of Charybdis, their watery juncture translates into a vortex which bears comparison with the hurricane of the winds, well-known for its calm 'eye' or that neutral space lying within the whirlpool.

But first our hero has to find his way to Kalypso, alone, and through a storm far worse than any yet experienced. It is the closing storm which ends the sequence and closes the ecliptic circle of his journey so far. The next stage will involve adoption of a vertical path from the navel of Kalypso's cave in the sea, upwards and beyond the Sun to the dazzling light of the Phaiakian kingdom.

CHAPTER TWELVE

KEEPERS OF THE COSMIC GATES: CIRCE AND KALYPSO

The two sea goddesses of the *Odyssey* provide a significant key to definitive points in the celestial journey. Long noted as 'close cousins' for their eerie likenesses, as singers, weavers, sexually rapacious hostesses and ultimately as helpful guides to Otherworld locations, Circe and Kalypso fulfil complementary roles in the epic. When introducing each by name, Homer subtly implies the essential link by technical means: reiterative lines pulling the listeners' memories back to previous lines, or creating anticipation of what is to come: "Where dwells….Kalypso, / of the ordered hair, a dread goddess"…. (7,245f.) is matched three times by the line "Circe / of the lovely hair, dread goddess endowed with speech" (10,135f. = 11, 5f. "who talks with mortals"; = 12, 148).[1] The important connection between the two women is underlined by their mutual beauty, their speech and their capacity to strike fear into the hearts of men.

Moreover, both women play host directly or indirectly to the messenger god Hermes, who is more usually portrayed leading the souls of the dead into the Underworld. On the other hand, Hermes does sometimes reveal a mission to the Heaven-bound soul, and that would seem to be his function in the Circe episode when he provides the hero with protection from the malevolence of the goddess, and in the cavern of Kalypso too, where he emphasises the will of the gods that Odysseus should be released and set on his way. And how else should the great messenger of the gods travel to do their will, but along that *axis* which links Heaven and Underworld? Hermes is, like Atlas, another god of the *axis*, just as Iris is the messenger goddess *of* the rainbow at the same time as she *is* the rainbow; the same bow is her belt as well as a path between Earth and Heaven.

Like many another goddess in Greek tradition, these two females exemplify major aspects of the great highway which leads below from Heaven, and vice versa. Not only is Kalypso[2] associated with Atlas (her 'father') but her home lies under the sea where the great *axis* must have its root-place. To all intents and purposes, the cavern is the great Underworld

omphalos, and in naming it "the navel of the sea", Homer has provided a most revealing indicator of the axial basis of his celestial geography. Michael Nagler (who writes at length of Homeric involvement with axial symbols)[3] sees both females as goddesses who dwell close to the *axis*, and this being so, they are closely associated with the life and knowledge which is transmitted by the divinity.

They have a close relative in the figure of Akkadian Siduri. She dwells by the sea, Gilgamesh remarks, and well knows its ways; he begs her to point the way to his destination:

> "But you dwell O tavern-keeper, on the shore [of the ocean]
> you are familiar with all [the ways across it]
> Show me the way, [O show me!]
> If it may be done [I will cross] the ocean!"[4]

Since the goddess replies that none but Shamash the Sun god can travel that way, it can be assumed that the ocean in question is the sky of night or day. Siduri, who seems to have 'the knowledge', holds the metaphoric key to the next stage of the journey - and the power to refuse it, judging by Gilgamesh's implorations. Kalypso will prove to share Siduri's knowledge of the ways across the ocean when she advises her visitor on the course he must set when he finally leaves her cavern.

The Elixir of Life

As a prototype, Siduri offers interesting insights into the role of the sea-dweller appointed to act as guide to the seeker after eternal life. She is an alewife in some translations, or a tavern-keeper, and by this token a provider of liquid nourishment which could well be the Water of Life. Circe too, offers hospitality, but hers is a more toxic potion, since as we know she is in the business of consigning souls to imprisonment in animal bodies. She is a *recycler* of souls, a malevolent figure initially, but as it emerges, she performs an essential task in the selection or rejection of the sky traveller. Kalypso too provides a generous measure of good things when she entertains the god Hermes with "ambrosia" and "red nectar" in her fragrant bower (5, 93). There is a similar tradition in Old Europe with the hospitable Scandinavian Aegir and his wife Ran who are said to pour beer for drowned sailors in their festive hall under the sea.[5] Yet why, one wonders, should *any* beverage figure in the business of 'return to life', and why 'under the sea'? The answer must lie, initially, in the polyvalence of those metaphors which deal with physical and spiritual nourishment. Just as the human body has to eat and drink to maintain life, so must the soul

take in divine sustenance if it is to acquire bliss in eternity; and just as Christians partake of the bread and wine, Gilgamesh will be found seeking the plant of immortality (with the intention of consuming it, it may be thought). To reach it, the Mesopotamian hero first "opened a channel", then tied heavy stones to his feet, which pulled him down "to the Ocean below".[6]

The Vedic sacrificer, too, will absorb the mysterious *Soma* (which is at various times an intoxicating drink, or a plant, column, tree, Milky Way or *axis mundi*, in short, a multi-form way to the gods). The Vedic conception of *Soma* links it with the Milky Way in its passage through the area of Gemini and Taurus, by which these two become associated with immortality; the houses of Scorpio and Sagittarius which lie directly opposite, across the circle of the Zodiac, have a different, more malevolent character associated with poison and death. As we have seen before, the *axis* consists of two opposite but complementary halves. However both sections display a red giant star of first magnitude: Aldebaran in Taurus (Vedic Rohini) and Antares in Scorpio (Jyestha). One is the star of good fortune; the other represents misfortune of the gravest kind. The animal chosen to represent each house interprets, in one case, the creative force, strength, fertility and wealth (Taurus) and in the other, poison from the fatal sting of the Scorpion. But the allocation of a water goddess, Apas, to the Sagittarius half of the line is a reminder that the rejuvenating waters of life can restore the *status quo*. Vedic scholars who speak of this as the 'Taurus / Scorpio axis' also stress the parallels that identify the two halves of the whole: both are ruled by goddesses whose creative coupling with a male being is at the heart of the fertilising and creative aspect of the 'Milky Way-as-Soma' phenomenon; hunters and hunted (notably deer or antelope), bows and bowmen also appear on both sides. The respective termini of the *axis* are considered portals of entry into passage along the linear path.

The food of immortality or 'the elixir of life' is guarded jealously by such guardians of the way as Kalypso and Siduri who are associated with the undersea as the lower section of the *axis*. Of Siduri, it is recorded by one translator that "she sits enthroned at the confluence of the rivers"[7] which lead to the Underworld. There is also much emphasis on the gates of Siduri's "tavern" which she locks and bars when she sees Gilgamesh approaching from afar; in Robert Temple's rendering of *Gilgamesh,* tablet X, his footnote 2 makes reference to the symbolic use of the particular terminology of these gates and bolts, which he reads as celestial signs. One may confidently consider Siduri as another guardian of the portals of Heaven, and since her character and function overlap so strikingly with

Kalypso's it is feasible to consider the two as occupying an identical cosmic location under the sea, where Homer's *omphalos* is gathering about it (as we would expect) a considerable number of axial references to caves, thrones, food and drink of immortality and the meeting of directions, not to mention mortal and divine visitations.

In view of our researches into the location of Homer's positioning of the entry to Hades, the confluence where Siduri sits enthroned may well be at the point where the two arms of the Milky Way divide into two parts popularly identified as two rivers. Kalypso too may be given a home there, where she dwells in a cavern watered by not two, but four rivers. Once other matters have been explored we shall return to the subject of this submarine home of Kalypso.

The Loving Goddesses

Whilst multiple similarities initially draw Circe and Kalypso together, in the final analysis they stand in marked opposition, as it were two sides of a single coin. One sends Odysseus to the ghosts and prophets of the Hadean underworld from which he must make his way back to his start point with Circe, while the other directs him to a paradisal location, Scheria, where the Phaiakians eventually facilitate his longed-for return to Ithaka and his wife, Penelope; but this final path involves *no* return to Kalypso. Of these two extra journeys within the greater circle of Adventures, both involving goddesses who become bedfellows of the hero, only one leads Odysseus to the island of his heart. Yet along the route, both Circe and Kalypso provide the hero with the same- or greater-sexual charge as his abandoned wife, who remains in Ithaka at the mercy of the importunate suitors and their marital demands. It is not possible to ignore the role of female sexual power in the resolution of the *Odyssey* and its link with a process of regeneration embedded in the Vedic mythology of the stars and zodiac. The narrative may describe physical congress, but it is the life of the spirit which forms the core of such encounters with goddesses, however 'dread'. In Middle Eastern literature and in the *Vedas,* as well as in Homeric lore, the union of male and female is an expression of far wider concerns than sexual gratification; the union is fundamentally that of the great progenitive principles of a creative duality, the pattern of life itself, which was celebrated ritually in that *hieros gamos,* sacred marriage, which many readers claim to have found in the final chapters of the *Odyssey*. The cosmic role of *Eros* is exemplified in the cosmogonic lore of Hesiod, who placed it third in the line of creation: first came Chaos, then, after Earth, came Love, "fairest among the deathless gods".[8]

Eros may be considered the most beautiful of the gods for the joy he brings to humankind, but his essential creative and regenerative power endows him with a metaphysical function as 'he who renews life'.

Of course the goddesses who determine individual destinies must have their own personalised *axis* or *omphalos* as a token of the power they draw from the prototype; so we find that Circe has her transformative magic wand and Kalypso her pleasant cave. There is however a shared token of their cosmic power, one which gives the most appropriate physical equivalent of the ideal *axis* for these powerful females, namely the loom across which their golden shuttle flies. Herein lies a body of symbolism too rich and ancient to be ignored. In Greco-Roman antiquity the Fates who wove the destinies of man most likely owed their being to far older eastern origins, Hindu and Buddhist and even Chinese, which interpreted the meeting of the warp thread (upright) and the weft (horizontal) as the centre of a cross, that is, the Centre of Being. In this manner weaving has provided the pictorial imagery of a metaphysical system placing man and his actions within the cosmic scheme. As explained by René Guénon in a chapter devoted to the symbolism of weaving, the horizontal direction, the weft, represents the human condition, and the vertical direction, the warp, the transcendent in relation to the profane.[9] As discussed earlier in the context of the relationship of Odysseus and Penelope the male represents the vertical *axis* (active principle) and the female (passive principle) the horizontal plane; this concept can now be extended to identify the vertical thread with the warp and the horizontal with the weft. This leaves the horizontal plane (and its potential to transform) in the hands of women, as indeed is the traditional craft activity itself; women are equally the agents whose spinning and weaving determine those destinies ascribed to sundry female 'Fates'. The ebb and flow of chance and determination described in Taoist doctrines as an alternation between life and death (Yin versus Yang) strongly resemble the to-and-fro motion of the shuttle across the loom.[10] Circe and Kalypso, it would seem, go about the same determinative task in their relationship with Odysseus. At first they are inimical and then they are beneficent, until finally their fickleness resolves into positive action at the separate moments when they finally advance the hero's progress.

Closer attention to the symbolic values of shuttle and loom in relevant contexts will reveal the parts played by the two goddesses as 'complementary opposites' (of the kind that can only be resolved by union at the centre, at the *axis*-point). It should finally become possible to ascribe an astronomical location and function to the two enigmatic females who befriend Odysseus.

Loom, Spindle and Shuttle

These simple artefacts are the major tools of a craft exercised by women throughout the ancient world and the source of economic power to those skilled in their use. But before a fabric may be woven, weight and spindle have to be used to draw out filaments from the wool and twist it into a thread, a skilled process requiring the attention of nimble fingers. Plato used the image of the spindle in his cosmic *Myth of Er*, where the spindle sat in the lap of Necessity (the Centre) and the spindle weight, by implication, drew down the thread like a plumb line; knowing the symbolism as we now do, it is possible to interpret the weighted 'thread' as a *spinning* axis as straight and true as the great *axis* itself. In fact the thread 'as spirit' is a standard form of the *axis* in Hindu symbolism, where it is simultaneously the 'gale' and the 'breath' of the Creator and the 'string' on which the Sun, the gods, and men are strung, like jewels upon a thread.[11]

The archaic Greek loom stood upright and could be roughly square in its proportions, as we see from a black figure illustration on an ancient ceramic showing two women standing at a loom taller than themselves.[12] A single weaver using a large frame would have been obliged to move from one side to the other to retrieve and re-cast the shuttle. How much easier it would have been to share the work by maintaining the to-and-fro rhythm with the help of a skilled companion; moreover, if the craft activity were accompanied by singing, the human tempo would remain constant, just as the constancy of solar time demands. Perhaps this is why "the dread goddesses" are singers.

The to-and-fro of the flying shuttle has its counterpart in the rotary motion of the fire drill discussed earlier as a prototype of the Churning of the Ocean of Milk, or equally, the use of fire sticks which are rubbed together to create a spark, or the bow-drill, which employs a string to assist the turn of the drill. Whether the tool in question is the fire drill, the sticks, or the bow drill, the motion would not be constant, but alternating. Apparently a discontinuous drilling or churning process which turns in part and then reverses itself before recommencing has been found to be the more ancient technique of the two;[13] and since the process of weaving on the loom involves the same forward-and-back alternation, shuttle and loom-frame would easily be accommodated to other cosmic imagery, particularly so since the path of the Sun follows a two-part, alternating course through day and night.

This is not the only solar symbolism implied in weaving. The crossing of warp and weft creates a whole series of junctions or mini-centres where

one thread bisects another. By such seemingly trivial, repetitive domestic chores involving the handling of heavily symbolic materials such as spindle and shuttle, and alternating movements akin to cosmic rhythms, the woman in her home unites herself, her kin, and the microcosm of her home to the wider macrocosmic model.[14] Furthermore, in the overlap implicit in *histos* meaning *mast*, and *histos* as *loom*, there lies another set of ancient embedded metaphors in which masts and spars, ropes and rigging have the potential to recall threads of warp and weft, and the loom is thereby identified with the ship as a cosmic vehicle and image of the cosmos itself, as indeed it is in Plato's *Myth of Er*.

The Weavers

It will be remembered how Penelope and Helen both 'wove' history and time on their ostensibly domestic looms, thereby anticipating and recalling the work of Circe and Kalypso; in thematic terms, they wove a cosmic motif into the *texture* of the epic *text.* Like the *Moirae*, who weave the fate of men, the two women were controlling or recording their own destinies through the power of their craft. Penelope wishes to delay an enforced marriage to a detested suitor by weaving and unweaving the shroud of Laertes, and Helen (who, like Penelope, is a "shining one" clad in "shimmering garments") creates a visual history of the sufferings of both sides in the Trojan War on "a great web, a red folding robe" (*Iliad* 3, 141; 125-128;). Penelope, who belongs to the olive-tree bed and to the pillar, also, and whose shuttle flies across her loom by day and is reversed at night, is revealed as another cosmic being with close connections with the major symbols of ancient cosmology.

It is not possible to discuss the weaver's frame and the weaving process without recognising that the space, form and motion which are configured in the symbolic loom are equally relevant to Time, in itself an abstract concept made visible by the movement of heavenly bodies through celestial space. Whatever the impulse, the similarity between the shape and function of the loom and the pattern of the Sun's movement across the skies (as seen in the graphic 'Frame of Time') would have been inescapable to the mind of any man or woman seeking analogous forms in the sky.

The woven piece *evolves*, i.e. changes over time (and *devolves* before *evolving*, in the case of Penelope's clever strategy in delaying the suitors) just as the weaving of fate encompasses past, present and future. Although Time is the less visible fourth dimension, no discussion of solar themes can disregard it, for the Sun is the first and greatest of the heavenly bodies,

our clock and compass which measures out Space and Time and cyclic change.

Moreover, the shuttle of Kalypso is golden, Homer tells us (5, 62). Gold always evokes the brightness and purity of the Sun together with whatever is durable or incorruptible in nature or in spirit. Therefore the emergent image of the golden flying shuttle interprets the transit of the Sun across the horizontal, daily east-west path of the Sun, and its return. When the square form of the loom is interpreted as a 'Frame of Time'[15] (daily descent in the west, ascent in the east**,** the shuttle tracing the daily traverse of the Sun) Circe and Kalypso are categorised as cosmic goddesses in charge of two vital positions in the transformative universe. The golden shuttle is the key to a resolution of their roles.

Locating the Islands of Circe and Kalypso

The east-west roles of these guardians are not in dispute, though some clarification will be useful here. Kalypso is the daughter of Atlas, "who…himself sustains the towering / columns ("*kionas…makras"*) which bracket Earth and sky and hold them together" (1, 52ff.). The plural is to be noted: these columns are the four sky supports related to the solstice corners in the axial system.[16] It is in respect of the cosmic pillar that we define the root place of the *axis mundi,* and Kalypso, as we have seen, is an echo-equivalent of Penelope at the foot of the pillar in her *oikos*. Kalypso detains the hero in her cave at "the navel of all the waters," *omphalos*,[17] on her "sea-washed island" which may be imagined to lie below the plane of the Earth, hence celestial south or underworld. On the other hand, Odysseus is told at the time of his release from Kalypso's over-affectionate embrace that when he sails north on her instructions, he must keep the Great Bear on his left hand side (5, 276f.). The conclusion is, puzzlingly at first glance, that Kalypso's territory lies *both* west and south, or west and 'below', perhaps at the nadir of the solar path. If instead of confining her to one location we allow her to belong to an artefact as mobile as the solar shuttle, her territory would comprise the quarter of the setting place of the Sun in the west and its lowest point on its daily or seasonal path, its nadir, which can be broadly described as the southern part of the ecliptic circle, where it enters the region of darkness. Aiolia has already given the model of a 'floating' island in the west.

The same cosmic synthesis of components of Earth, sea and sky is involved in Circe's lineage as the daughter of Helios, the Sun, and Perse, "Ocean" (10, 135-139). Aiaia, we learn, lies "in the house of early Dawn" which must be in the eastern hemisphere; and yet the reference to the

"uprising" of Helios into his "dancing spaces" introduces the sky element, *height,* therefore the north or upper sky.

There could also be a case for considering Circe and Kalypso's home islands as lying not simply on a cardinal or inter-cardinal direction, but in a starry constellation which marks the heliacal rising or setting of the Sun. In such a case, "the house of early Dawn" could refer to a house of the Zodiac in which the Sun rose at dawn on a particular day. The same thinking would most likely apply to the 'house' of Kalypso. In such a case, we would be referring to conjunctions (or 'overlaps') either visible or open to imagination as meeting places. In the final analysis, even more crucial 'islands' on this journey will be found to lie at significant points of conjunction such as the meeting or crossing points of the Sun's ecliptic, including solstices, zenith and nadir, the Moon, Zodiac houses and the constellations they contain.

Circe appears to be related to both east and north, or east and 'above'. She would be the goddess of the rising and midday Sun and the complement to Kalypso's descending evening Sun. In Jungian terms, as a daughter of the Sun Circe is associated with light, and this in turn indicates the 'light of understanding'. And yet Circe is firmly rooted in the dark and primitive in her connection with beasts, which are transmuted and imprisoned human souls. This does not bode well for their enlightenment; but before we dismiss her as an agent of darkness, it is well to remember that her place on the northern part of the ecliptic is only a half-way stage in the course of man's 'coming to the light'. She cannot provide the understanding they seek, but she can point the way.

Her control over the men she brutalises and turns into swine makes Circe a 'Mistress of the Animals' at home in a wilderness far removed from the domesticated hearths of civilised society. In exercising her power through the medium of her sexuality, Circe is aligned with the primitive goddess of earliest times when men were hunter-gatherers; she requires the steadying influence of her other half, Kalypso, whose realm is the vegetative terrain of the settled farmer and whose sexuality is less aggressive. If, moreover, the state of their respective hearths may be taken as a measure of their separate values as indicators of evolutionary progress, then the weak smoke of Circe's dwelling is certainly outclassed by the vigorous flame warming Kalypso's cavern.

Stars or Constellations?

In our search for the homes of two same-but-different goddesses, perhaps we should be seeking stellar features lying beyond the solar orbit

and following a similar east-west trajectory. Possible candidates must include the Morning and Evening stars which were believed until Hellenistic times to be quite separate bodies. Nowadays we know them to be alternating appearances of Venus, an inferior but brilliant planet closely orbiting the Sun, whose light it reflects. The Morning Star rises in the east a few hours before the Sun, whilst the Evening Star only becomes visible as the setting Sun darkens the sky in the west. See-saw timing of their appearances creates a linear, east-west bond (perhaps the horizontal arm of the see-saw or the path of the golden shuttle across the loom) and their rising and setting trajectories follow the same 'west and down' and 'east and up' as we have proposed for islands of Circe and Kalypso. In Akkadian tradition, Inanna / Ishtar personified the Morning Star rising from the waters (the horizon) at break of day. She had a Greek counterpart in Aphrodite ('born of the sea') and like Inanna, was also a goddess of love. Perhaps we should think of Circe and Kalypso too as love goddesses - certainly physical enchantment forms a vital part of their armoury, and Odysseus' separate dalliances with first Circe and then Kalypso energise the traveller sufficiently to send him onwards to further critical stages in his personal evolution.

If, instead of single stars, we project Circe and Kalypso as starry constellations, the strongest candidates are those found in the zodiac houses of Taurus and Scorpio, whose contrary appearances follow the same pattern: in autumn, just before sunrise, Taurus sets in the west whilst Scorpio rises in the east; in spring, the reverse is the case. Taurus and Scorpio lay on the celestial equator in the years 4,000-2000 BCE. The two very bright 'red giant' stars of first magnitude already discussed, distinguish these constellations: in Taurus, Aldebaran marks the 'Eye of the Bull' while Antares (Hindu Rohini, the 'ruddy one') identifies the 'Heart of the Scorpion'. Lying diametrically opposite from each other, they divide the Zodiac belt into two parts. As 'Watchers of the Skies', or 'Royal Stars of Persia', they became major reference stars for locating other stars of the Zodiac in the Babylonian star system.[18] The brilliance of Aldebaran and Antares has even lead David Ulansey to identify these two stars with the Mithraic torchbearers, and the Dioskouroi 'twins', and the equinoctial points on the equator.[19] We shall return to this subject later.

Since both female divinities occupy a well-defined centre point at the source of four rivers or fountains (personified as four water nymphs in the case of Circe, 10, 348-351) Homer's audience must know that cave and house are to be understood as central in a metaphysical sense. On both islands, Odysseus finds himself at a major point of transition. Whereas the celestial doorways he has encountered to date in the course of his solar

journey have neither caused his death nor permitted his passage into a realm beyond the Sun, Circe on her island allows (and indeed enforces) his journey to the mouth of the Underworld, whilst receiving him again upon his safe return from the pivot point of the circular structure of his Adventures. Thereafter, as we have seen, her guidance facilitates Odysseus' eventual emergence from a further set of trials through the eastern half of the circle.

The simplest solution to these directional problems is that Kalypso occupies or represents the southern hemisphere of the globe and Circe the northern (these directions extended out into space) with the rider that one indicates movement *downwards* in line with western setting Sun (and its eventual return) and the other oversees movement *upwards* through the eastern hemisphere, in line with the rising Sun. The final position of each would be Kalypso, west, moving south or below, Circe, east, moving north or above: that is, a transit between nadir and zenith respectively, in terms of the limits of the Sun or the projection to those limits into the outer space of the firmament. Their identification with individual stars or constellations following this movement would be a development making little difference to their essential function, here believed to be as essential 'guardians of the two ways' or gatekeepers of the entrance to one celestial path or the other. As we shall see, there are further cosmic features to fix their positions even more precisely at these junctures.

The Path of the Shuttle

These assumptions lead to a further hypothesis. It has been argued in previous chapters that the sequence of Adventures, minus the Circe / Kalypso locations, provides a solar circuit with eight separate opportunities for emergence. Only as a result of his visit to Kalypso at the southerly point of the circuit following the Skylla-Charybdis of the south-east, and also the start point and end point of the hero's relation as told in the halls of Alkinoös, does Odysseus reach the blessed island of the Phaiakians and his eventual return. Circe's advice involves departure, return and re-departure; in other words, it is contained within a loop, as a circle within a circle. This prioritises the Kalypso episode over the Circean; and although one points up the other in true Homeric fashion, it is the visit to Kalypso which provides the opportunity for a successful 'escape from the circle'.

After the stay upon Kalypso's island and the closing of a solar (and a narrative) circle, a place must be found for Scheria and the homeland, Ithaka. Nor can Hades fit easily into a solar pattern, except as non-Sun, a

Land of Darkness. We shall have to pass eventually beyond the goddesses' sphere of influence by venturing deeper into cosmic space and the metaphysics of the soul's transformation. What is required is a path or paths tied to the crucial locations in which the two goddesses act as separate guardians of a 'doorway'. (There is no point to a door unless it is attached to a house or to a path leading to a specific place). Such a path would bind the two places into a unity, whilst indicating the direction in which the soul (in this case, the soul of Odysseus) would progress or regress, as the case may be.

Mithraism and the Tauroctony

Ancient cosmologists used their knowledge of the Zodiac to highlight certain points as places where spiritual transformation could occur (as in the case of comic gateways). Unfortunately for our purpose, there are insufficient texts contemporaneous with the *Odyssey* to clarify Homeric thinking on these matters. In order to gain some insight into the astronomical basis of the soul journey as it may have been conceived in the eighth century BCE, or earlier, we must turn to a later phenomenon which may provide some clues to the poet's thinking. The iconography involved in the decoration of the Mithraic cave, which was effectively a 'temple' and a 'classroom' combined, has been studied extensively in recent years and may offer some useful insights into the epic voyage.

The Cave of Mithras and the Cave of the Nymphs

The Hellenistic cult of Mithra was celebrated in underground rooms usually shaped by hand and ornamented with complex mythological elements. They were so designed that the interior replicated a rotating sphere whose vertical poles indicated a ceiling-zenith and subterranean nadir. They were, in effect, a three-dimensional and tangible replica of the visible universe, an ideal teaching aid which anyone (like the present writer) may well envy when struggling to explain a three-dimensional world on the two-dimensional space of printed paper.

A 'centre' is implicit at the point where this (conceptual) axis-pole meets the longitudinal and latitudinal mid-point of the floor. But the focus of the ritual and initiatory activity was the Tauroctony or bull-slaying scene portrayed on the wall opposite the entrance. In many versions the planets and the constellations of the Zodiac lie all about the scene, as animals and birds amid tightly-defined cardinal directions including zenith and nadir. What has been created in the Mithraic cave is a reconstruction

of the known universe capable of providing a context for ritual feasts and ceremonies, the latter possibly intended to record individual progress through grades of initiation or to anticipate and encourage that progress, which was likened to the ascension of the soul through the planetary spheres. Such caves provided a practical teaching tool for the untutored, a lesson in paint and stone for the literate and non-literate, just like the decorative arts of later mediaeval cathedrals which provided the textbook of the common people.

Although the mysteries of Mithras were elaborated largely in the Roman Empire between the last century BCE and the following four centuries, their antecedents have been speculatively referred back to the rites of the Avestan god Mithras, and even to the Indic Mitra who features in the *Rg Veda*. (The highly complex and much disputed question of origins and the debates concerning the precise iconography of the bull-slaying scene are here left to specialists in this complex field).[20] Our immediate task is to uncover parallels between the Mithraic solar journey and the course of Odysseus' own voyage of initiation, and especially the secret doctrines embodied in each. Of special interest is the role of the paired male figures that flank the bull-slaying scene.

A particular link in our quest for prototypes of Circe and Kalypso is provided by a Mithraic-inspired interpretation of Homer's 'Cave of the Nymphs' written by the Neoplatonist Porphyry in the third century CE. Porphyry's interpretation figures widely in current twenty-first century explanations of the Tauroctony's complex iconography. Readers of Homer will be familiar with the 'Cave of the Nymphs' (on Ithaka) which is a lovely but mysterious cave near the sea shore, sacred to the spirits who weave their purple webs on the stone looms fixed there among stone jars full of honey, where the clear water is "ever flowing". The similarity between this dwelling and those of two other weavers, Circe and Kalypso, who also live close to flowing streams, will not pass unremarked. The description of the Cave concludes with the lines:

> "It has two entrances,
> one of them facing the North Wind, where people can enter,
> but the one toward the South Wind has more divinity. That is
> the way of the immortals, and none can enter by that way." (13, 102-112).

The passage presents many difficulties of interpretation. Nevertheless, there is some likelihood that these few lines contain, on the basis of a physical approximation of immortals (gods, or possibly the initiated) and people ('mortals', 'men', or the uninitiated) a highly condensed doctrine of salvation, redemption, or life after death. Analysis can only proceed

from the simplest element, which is predominantly the two opposing conditions of gods and men with whom are associated opposing paths. Identification of these will support our speculation concerning the possible implications of the structure. There is, for example, no clear indication from the poet whether the ascending or descending individual may pass *through* to the opposite side, though in the case of the immortals it may be assumed that like some of Homer's divinities, the beings in question will be free to roam between Earth and Heaven at will.

Certain pages of René Guénon's analysis of the symbolism of the cave and its solstitial gates[21] which has already helped us to understand ancient figurative thinking can come to our aid here once more, in helping to interpret the distinction between the 'way north' and the 'way south'. The (cosmic) cave exemplifies a doctrine of two ways or paths, quite distinct from each other but fundamentally aligned to a single course, which must here be zenith-nadir or nadir-zenith since a contrast is drawn between celestial divinity ("immortals", initiates of a higher grade, the 'sacred') and terrestrial non-divinity ("men", initiates to the lesser mysteries, the 'profane'), in which physical geography is not necessarily the prime factor. When initiatory rituals are conducted in actual caves or underground chambers it is obviously not possible for the initiand to enter from the south, from below the cave; instead, suggests Guénon,[22] he must return by the way he entered (as in the Cave of Trophonius, and, it must be said, as in Odysseus' entry into the Cave of the Nymphs and his emergence). The impossibility of entering the space from underground which Guénon has signalled does not apply if the whole journey is a theoretical (or fictional) one, in which the soul progresses upwards from the underside or undersea aspect of the world, as it does from the cavern of Kalypso.

As far as the Cave of the Nymphs is concerned, the major difference consists in the nature of the two *termini* at the opposing ends of the path. The path may be imagined as a dual carriageway with separate lanes for ascending or descending spirits, or it may have a single way used in alternating fashion; but the end result is the same, and the crux of the matter is the direction and destination of the soul. In his commentary *De antro nympharum* (28) Porphyry[23] identified the northern (i.e. north-facing) gate of Homer's cave with Cancer, and the southern, south-facing gate with Capricorn, with the result that the two gates were now to be located at the solstice turning points of the Sun on the two tropic positions. As often noted here, these are the points where the Sun appears to slow its course.

Macrobius[24] (another Neoplatonist) called upon Orphic and Pythagorean traditions when he claimed that the souls of men rested in the Milky Way

between incarnations. Ascension, he wrote, took place through the "gate of genesis", Capricorn, and descent from the gates of Cancer,[25] but these he defined in terms of the sidereal constellations ("signs") which rose at the solstices, namely Gemini to the north and Sagittarius to the south. These constellations still rise today in the same heliacal positions. In book 12 of his commentary, Macrobius clarified the point that from the borders of Cancer / Gemini, movement involved *descent*, and from Capricorn / Sagittarius, *ascent*; both start points coinciding with the great band of the Milky Way:

> "The Milky Way girdles the Zodiac, its great circle meeting it obliquely so that it crosses it at the two tropical signs, Capricorn and Cancer. Natural philosophers named these the 'portals of the Sun'.[26]

The same text (1.12. 4-5) signals the intersection of Milky Way with the house of Cancer on the ecliptic and stresses its importance in the soul's progress:

> "While the souls which are about to descend are yet in Cancer they are still in the company of the gods because in that constellation they have not yet left the Milky Way…From there, that is from the borderland where the Zodiac and the Milky Way intersect, the descending soul is drawn out in its precipitous rush from a sphere…just as a line is born from a point and evolves from an indivisible state into dimensionality."

Although Macrobius' account of the soul's birth or return to material existence is more detailed than any account provided by Homer (and later by many centuries) it does reach the same conclusions concerning the transformative points on the ecliptic and the relevance of the meeting of the great highways as those reached quite independently in this study, and before acquaintance with the Neoplatonists.

We have reached a stage where both New World, Greek and Egyptian traditions consider the crossing points of the ecliptic and the Milky Way (which also contains the lunar node crossing points) to be critical junctures in the migration of souls, most specifically, as *celestial doorways.* The ascending and descending paths beginning at Cancer and Capricorn lead onwards from the solstitial doors of the summer solstice (Cancer) and the winter solstice (Capricorn).[27]

At this point it will be useful to return to Mithraic iconography to study the roles of two figures of the same-but-opposite disposition as Circe and Kalypso, the Mithraic twins.

The Torchbearers

The 'twins' Cautes and Cautopates are the *dadophoroi* or torch bearers who often, but not invariably, flank the central panel of the Tauroctony. One carries an upward-pointing torch, the other a torch inverted. Both have significance as emblems of the solstices. Porphyry noted the central, 'equinoctial' position of Mithras in the composition of the Tauroctony which effectively defined the flanking positions of Cautes as summer, north, and Cautopates as winter, south.[28] Ulansey takes matters a step further with the suggestion that the twins represent northern and southern hemispheres of the globe, with Cautes representing movement from the spring equinox / equator towards the upper heaven and his counterpart the downward path from the autumn equinox towards the lower world. This is an ingenious solution identifying personalities with *floating* locations which gives a useful pointer towards a definition of roles and locations for Circe and Kalypso; moreover, it recalls the fate of the Dioscouric twins of Homer, of whom one (Castor) was immortal, the other (Pollux) mortal, the one often rumoured to dwell in Heaven and the other in the Underworld (11, 298-304). "They live still every other day (303)". These brothers are often portrayed wearing the Phrygian cap, in which some have seen as the two halves of the egg from which they emerged, their mother being Leda the swan; these same ' half-eggs' have even prompted Arthur Cook also to interpret the brothers as representatives of the upper and lower hemispheres.[29] In this book, Circe and Kalypso are given the same division of space.

However the iconography of surviving Roman *mithraea* indicates an even more complex picture.

The two torch-bearing figures invoke 'sameness and difference' through the very etymology of their titles: the source is unknown, but clearly 'Cautopates' is built upon 'Cautes'.[30] In his analysis of the roles of the two torch carriers, Roger Beck has examined multiple examples of confronted twins in surviving *mithraea* and by study of their iconography, their placement, and their ritual roles, has uncovered some puzzling inconsistencies. Sometimes they appear to represent dawn and dusk of the daily cycle, at other times they would seem to indicate the annual course of the Sun, or even the alignment of two bright stars, which he identifies with Aldebaran in Taurus and Antares in Scorpio, since the torchbearers occasionally carry staffs topped by a stellar symbol.[31] In the final analysis, Beck had to acknowledge the essential polyvalence of the images as opposed or complementary pairs: they must represent equinoxes, solstices and / or ascending or descending nodes.[32] He also suggests that they stand

for the opposing constellations or signs of Taurus and Scorpio found at the opposing edges of the Tauroctony. David Ulansey has also advanced the case for opposing sidereal constellations as an explanation for the placement of the two figures.[33] He goes even further, to identify them with the Dioskouroi, the far more ancient stellar twins of Greek mythology,[34] as well as casting them as representatives of the equinoxes, i.e.
Taurus / spring equinox = Cautes; Scorpio / autumn equinox = Cautopates.

In truth, there is much in the iconography of this pair to link them to the same oppositional pattern as we are seeing in the Mithraic twins. As already noted, the *dokana* or H-bar frame they carry in monuments from Sparta,[35] where they were revered as dual kings, bears a strong resemblance to the Frame of Time with its two uprights (ascending and descending solar paths, linked by the horizontal Equator).

There is no space here to pursue the twin theme any further, but it is useful to note that confronted figures of the Mithraic type and the Dioskouroi have many iconographic antecedents in Minoan and Mycenaean cult images, variously as twin lions (the great Gate of Mycenae itself), twin pillars, or confronted goats flanking sacred mountains or their sanctuaries, etc., an especially prominent feature in Minoan art and architecture. In some 'Master (or Mistress) of the Animals' figures, for example, the human male or female holds up paired lions or other creatures, and occasionally one of these is inverted in a manner reminiscent of the inverted torch.[36] The sense is of a central cosmic power reflected in the opposing movements of the Sun, and all that is implied for human health and happiness in this model of an ordered universe.

Joscelyn Godwin adds a further note to the role of the twins,[37] to the effect that Cautopates, as symbol of the barren half of the year, signifies (from the Hermetic or Platonic point of view) the loss of the soul's light on entry into the body, and Cautes, its rebirth after death. He stresses the importance of the mystic function of these astronomic symbols indicating precise stages in the spiritual progress of the initiand.

None of the interpretations covered by the polyvalence seems to conflict with any other. The pupil needs only to know of the meeting places of the two solstices (identified by reference to the intervening equinoxes) with the great arc of the Milky Way, which identify his possible destinations, and these are helpfully signified in many *mithraea* by the line of the raised or inverted torches.

As for the bull itself which serves as the central focus of action, Beck relates Mithras 'the Sun' to the Sun in Leo, whilst the bull is the Moon in Cancer, the preceding sign. The conflict of Sun and Moon revealed in the stabbing of the bull by Mithras is suggested by a *scholium* on Statius by

Lactantius Placidus,[38] where the encounter of Sun and Moon is interpreted as an eclipse ('the Sun 'kills' the Moon'). It is particularly interesting that the cusp or meeting point of Cancer and Leo (as Moon and Sun respectively, so potentially a point of eclipse) has been named by Servius, a fourth century CE commentator on Virgil's *Georgics*, as a third Zodiac point of soul migration via a celestial gate.[39] In another context, Plutarch[40] ventured that Sun and Moon are both places where souls originate and ultimately return. In the *Genius of Socrates* he recorded that the mind of man, *nous*, emerges from the Sun and returns to it, whilst it is on the Moon that *nous* will unite with soul, *psyche,* before birth into the material world, and after death *nous* in similar fashion will part from *psyche* on the Moon. These are deep matters which may well have some relevance to the reunion of Odysseus ('solar hero') and Penelope ('rain and fertility' or 'Moon') and the meeting of the two at a time and point of eclipse. Is this, perhaps, the transcendent meaning of Odysseus' extreme need to find his way back to his island, his wife and his destiny? For the moment, it must suffice to note a place where Sun and Moon, and particularly their co-inciding, have a part to play in the journey into the Afterlife.

Furthermore, if we are correct in assuming that Circe's island is an 'eclipse island' where direction is lost, and the island of Ithaka another of the same potential (as we shall explain in a later chapter) then by implication Kalypso too should be dwelling on an eclipse site since her home lies at the tail of the lunar dragon, opposite Circe's dragon head, and another lunar node. The oppositional factors of these extraordinary locations would go a long way towards explaining the bold symmetry employed by the poet in his characterisation of Circe and Kalypso.

Also, the centre point of the Tauroctony may well portray an eclipse. If so, Servius' mention of a Sun-Moon eclipse as a celestial gate makes good sense in the context of our researches. For the moment, let us stay with the nodal point, in image-terms the head or tail of a dragon. From the evidence of the *mithraeum* on the island of Ponza, the nodal dragon could indeed feature in Mithraic ritual. A long snake features there in a Zodiac painted on the stucco ceiling. At the centre lie the two Bears, in a circle; an outer circle contains the snake, and the third, the Zodiac proper. As the viewer within the cave looks up, he sees the sky of the northern hemisphere centred upon the Bears of the North Pole. This unusual arrangement of the surrounding Zodiac sequence has led Beck[41] to consider an artistic priority rarely seen, namely the inclusion at Ponza of the snake as the eclipsing dragon of the lunar nodes.[42]

All the evidence of the Mithraic iconography points to a major interest in the roles played by Sun and Moon in the genesis of souls, particularly

their origin and their final journeys. Thus Porphyry once more: "the theologians make the Sun and Moon gates for souls, and say that they ascend through the Sun and descend through the Moon".[43] This being so, there would have been enormous interest in the conjunction of the two, and the eclipses associated with their meeting; it follows that among the many oppositional functions expressed in the persons of the torchbearers might well include the functions of head and tail of the dragon, and the up / down paths of the soul's transition. A pair of junctures which acted as distinct 'crossroads' for lunar, solar, solstitial *and* galactic paths (Milky Way at night, matched by the Rainbow of day) would be the ideal focus of the torches, one pointing the way *up* to eternity, whilst the lowered torch would serve as a companion piece indicating the road *down* into death or regeneration.

Finally, if the head and tail may have been anthropomorphised by the Mithraists as Cautes and Cautopates, "same yet opposite", and by the Vedic astrologers as Rahu and Ketu, may the earlier Greek oral tradition not have found a similar role for Circe and Kalypso? Who can resist the extraordinary coincidence of the names Circe (= Kirke) / Kalypso; Cautes / Cautopates; Cancer and Capricorn, which repeat the initial K sound, at the same time as they represent diametrically opposite locations? In his *Timaeus,* Plato uses the Greek letter X (sounded K) to represent the obliquity of the ecliptic and its meeting with the equator, when the two lines create "a cross".[44] The same X-pattern may be projected upon a theoretical crossing of the two arms of the Milky Way, as they were used in Mesoamerican cosmology to identify the centre of the upper world. This 'X' also appears on Mithraic images of Aion, 'Time' who stands on a globe of the world banded by two diagonals. As we have shown, the solar or galactic paths provide the mediating idea which links powers and places with times of transformation. Of greatest importance is co-incidence or coming-together of two or more phenomena, in a single time and place, by which a point of exceptional power is identified.

By bringing together evidence gathered from the combination of solar, lunar and galactic paths, Mithraism and other practices and beliefs, and setting it against the leading characteristics of the two divine hostesses, it has been possible to gain some insight into the cosmic values of Homer's two remarkable goddesses. The story is quite a simple one, but since it has taken so long to tell and to support from multiple sources the information has been condensed and presented below in tabular form at the end of this chapter. The first vertical column on the left names images, concepts, places and times which relate to features discernible in similar images, concepts, places and times relevant to the circumstances of Circe and

Kalypso. Some of the items are not yet fully explained, but will be made clear in a following chapter where a more detailed analysis of the Circe and Kalypso material will build upon the summary presented here in brief. All and any of these units are interchangeable. One may discuss Cautes in terms of a northern hemisphere or solstice point or a journey down the axis of the lunar dragon, or Kalypso as the goddess of the southern galactic centre, who is able to direct the voyaging soul 'upwards' on its way to paradise or the divine presence. The same parallels apply to the terrestrial world, where barren seasons constrict the physical self in winter, and the rising Sun brings richness and plenty in summer.

From the confines of terrestrial existence the only movement into physical liberation is by ascent into the *aither*, but whether one will find a permanent refuge there is literally in the lap of the gods. The admirable De Santillana and von Dechend resumed so much of what has been presented here as the course of Odysseus' Adventures and their *raison d'être,* when they described Gemini and Sagittarius as the original hinges of the night sky. Between them these houses span the arch of the Milky Way, creating a visible path to the gods.

Having explored the likely pattern, it remains to unravel some of the other aspects of Circe and Kalypso which contribute further to the overriding theme. Circe and her association with Hades will be the first subjects for our attention.

Summary: Cosmic Homelands of Circe and Kalypso

Key Image	Represented by Circe	… and Kalypso
Cave of the Nymphs	Northern entrance, movement south	Southern entrance, movement north
Soul journey	Down	Up
Lunar node	Rahu	Ketu
Lunar dragon	Head, movement to tail	Tail, movement to head
Loss of direction	Eclipse	Hurricane
Hemisphere	North	South
Cardinal position	Northern night skies	Southern night skies
Movement towards	South and Hades	North and Scheria
Mithraism	Cautes (torch down)	Cautopates (torch up)
Tropic/solstice	Cancer	Capricorn
Season	Summer	Winter
Zodiac	Gemini / Taurus	Sagittarius / Scorpio
Possible Star	Aldebaran in Taurus	Antares in Scorpio
Galaxy	Anti-Galactic centre	Galactic Centre
Outcome…	**Reincarnation, in physical body, or death;**	**Integration with the divinity.**

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE TRANSFORMATIVE PATH

Poison in the Sky, Ambrosia under the Sea

It has been noted in passing that the *axis* of the world can be represented by a magical drink. *Soma* to the Vedic seers, *Haoma* to the Persians, wine to the followers of Dionysos, all seem to hark back to the hallucinogenic, mind-altering drugs used worldwide for shamanic purposes. They are each associated with sacred trees, of which they may be the liquid essence extracted for cultic uses via pressing or fermentation. Now we encounter Circe dispensing a shape-altering drug to her hapless victims, which is eventually to be countermanded by Hermes' antidote in the form of magical *moly*. Kalypso, on the other hand, quite suitably dispenses ambrosia and red nectar to Hermes, her divine visitor on another island (5, 93; 199) and "mortal" food to Odysseus (196f.) but she could well have offered any guest in her cavern a wine pressed from the "flourishing / growth of vine that ripened with grape clusters" which twined "right about the cavern" (5, 68f.). Remembering Siduri and the Norse account of Aegir's wife Ran as similarly divine barmaids, we have to question the relevance of the beverage in general to the soul's progression.

Was this potion offered by the alewife Ran an elixir of eternal life? A potion which may even revive the drowning Norsemen at the bottom of the sea? An answer in the affirmative rests on cross-cultural analogies, of which there are several. Gilgamesh, for one, had to recover the plant which would give him immortality, from a deep well. Both he and Odysseus were travellers in search of a particular goal and both are recorded as 'diving deep' into a watery underworld such as that of Kalypso's underwater cave. Gilgamesh fell deep into the waters to obtain his talismanic plant, as did Beowulf too, in the eponymous early English saga which set the hero against the forces of evil lying deep in a cave at the bottom of a lake. By defeating the mother of the cannibalistic Grendel in her watery hideaway, Beowulf was able to restore order to the halls of the king. All these instances indicate a set metaphor of probable shamanic origin[1] involving a source of life of which plant or drink are the magical

'means of ingestion' for any seeker after eternal life who may have reached this distant location: the 'Well at the World's End', which is a 'Fountain of Life'.

The next stage in this voyage of discovery is to relate undersea or underwater places such as these to the astronomical markers which are concealed within the mythic discourse. Prominent among these, as we have seen, is the Milky Way. In some cultures the Milky Way is seen as a great rip in the Heavens which divides the firmament into two hemispheres. Through this rent in the fabric of the universe the life-giving creative essence of the higher cosmos, which is a vital force for the dissemination of earthly fertility, may be imagined to flow, but the same essence is also considered to be an imparter of wisdom and immortality to earthbound creatures. This substance, perhaps by association with the whiteness of the Way, has been likened to milk or milky semen (hence representative of fertility, or regeneration of the soil) or to a food or drink which 'feeds' the substance of the divine realm into the mouths of the mortal being below on Earth.[2]

Therefore the play of contrary or complementary potions implicit in the Circe / Kalypso sequence of *poison-moly / ambrosia-wine* creates a further identification between the goddesses and that immortality promised to Odysseus by Kalypso, who alone of the two has access to the food of the gods and maybe even the *moly* plant, of which the poet says only that it has black roots, a white flower, and is hard for any but the gods to pull up (10, 304-306). It would be futile to add to the countless attempts to identify the botanical species in question which have been discussed since antiquity, and in any case things in Homer are so often not what they seem. However, any plant which offers protection from evil, as *moly* seems able to do, has a magical function, confirmed in this case by the ease with which the gods may draw it from the ground. The black and white *moly* will not easily give up its secrets, but we may suspect that it belongs with other life-giving plants in a category where 'life' means something other than mortal existence.

So the profusion of good and edible plants associated with Kalypso stands in marked contrast to the destructive potion brewed up by Circe. This if nothing else should alert the reader to a contrast between the associated goddesses based on their 'life-taking' and 'life-giving' functions which once again establishes them not only as opposites, but in the process ties their narrative roles into the deeper theme of the Epic, namely life and renewal, of which the plants in question are the traditional symbols. Circe's halls should hold out promise of life, in the Vedic scheme of things, but in Homer's version, experience of the life-death

duality appears to be a condition of that renewal; Kalypso's cave in the house of Sagittarius proves to be the safer haven which opens the way to a higher form of existence.

More Gate-keeping Guardians

While Sagittarius defended the celestial location on his doorstep, as we saw earlier, he was ready with his bow and arrow to repel enemies. He is not alone in his dual function. There are several examples in ancient literature and later, perhaps derivative traditions, where the gatekeeper must initially defend the threshold but would exercise discretion in the manner in which he dealt with visiting agents.

There is no shortage of 'Milky Way guardians' in the folklore of old Europe and the Middle East, and even further afield. To the Akkadians, the Way was both the 'River of the Divine Lady' and the Great River. In Scandinavia Hela is a psychopomp who waits at the end of the Way, *Hvergelemer*, to welcome the voyaging spirits of the dead travelling along the *Helvegr*; and in Nicaragua the Scorpion goddess (surely at home in Scorpio?) not only receives them, but brings them to life again as new souls. Lakota Indians of North America have a more sinister 'Owl Goddess' who examines the spiritual credentials of the souls and pushes them back into earthly existence if they do not meet her rigorous standards.

The *Myth of Adapa*, as told on second millennium tablets from Tel el-Amarna and Assur,[3] tells of the sage's journey to the creator god in Heaven along the Milky Way. Adapa meets gatekeepers Tammuz and Gishzida, who are fertility gods of seasonal death and renewal. He is denied entry into everlasting life for reasons unstated and must return to terrestrial mortality. But the clearest evidence comes from the gatekeepers who confront Gilgamesh as the 'scorpion men' at the gates of Mount Mashu, who might be intended as replicas of the scorpion-archer who guards the galactic centre seen earlier. Moments of trial arise much later for both Gilgamesh and Odysseus, in the land of Utnapishtim for Gilgamesh, and at the court of Alkinoös or in his own *oikos* for Odysseus. The outcome of their arrival will be assessed in a later chapter.

With this fragmentary but self-supporting evidence, our steps towards a true Homeric geography become a little surer.

Finding our Way

Finally it is possible to explain certain confusing directions given by the two goddesses to the hero Odysseus. They must be interpreted in terms of celestial geography. To resume: the Milky Way has an east-west phase at dawn and another which is approximately north-south and is seen most clearly at night. (Consequently the latter is the branch of the Way which is familiar to the inhabitant of the northern hemisphere). The Sun reaches the highest point it ever attains in the sky at midday at the June solstice, at the zenith, on the borders of Gemini / Taurus, 'head of the dragon'. The swing of the great stellar arch of the Way provides two locations for goddess-dwellings at its extremities: east and north (Circe), west and south (Kalypso). This is echoed by the swing of the solar solstice pattern which creates a conceptual, linear path between its highest and lowest points. By supposing that Circe's home lies at the 'head of the dragon' in the north or north-east, a point which coincides with the Anti-Galactic centre and summer solstice height, we can see that the only direction in which Odysseus can be sent by Circe is *downward*, either southwards along the Milky Way (or similar phenomenon) or below it. This is accomplished during the *Nekyia*, following which Odysseus returns to his hostess in order to resume his journey along the eastern ecliptic until the path brings him to the Galactic Centre of Kalypso's 'undersea' habitation, in a dark, visible space, for all the world like a cave. Circe gives the traveller and his companions a North Wind to bear him to Hades (10, 504-507) and a "following" one on his second departure (12, 148f.). In the context, north must mean 'from the upper world to the lower'. The subsequent 'following' wind may be presumed to carry him along the course abandoned earlier, along the clockwise path of the ecliptic towards more feats of survival.

Therefore we conjecture once again that the wind which blows from the north means 'from above', as it has proved so far, and especially in the case of the Hyperborean legends. This would confirm Circe in the zenith position and distinguish her ecliptic point from the simpler (compass) point, north, here allocated to the Sirens. She occupies a very special place and a specific time in her house of Gemini on the solar path, at the midday zenith of the summer solstice day, when the Sun's powers are greatest and shadows are negligible or non-existent, and the world subject to darkening eclipses, one of which becomes the source of Odysseus' directional difficulties.

From this point it will be useful to pick up what we have earlier hypothesised concerning the rock as a marker of the entrance to Hades or to Heaven.

The White Rock

For the opening into Hades itself, Homer supplies a precise description of an Ocean shore marked by a rock at the "junction of two thunderous rivers" (10, 513-515) and lying by or between the streams of Ocean, the gates of the Helios and the country of dreams (24, 11f.). This rock has already been identified as an *omphalos* marker stone for the penetration of the plane by the *axis*. Could this also be the point where the Milky Way splits into two, like the 'legs of Nut'? This area was identified in Egypt, we noted, by the star Deneb, and conceptualised as an area of 'birth'. The star has the same meaning for Pawnee and Cherokee Indians, who say that the souls of the dead are received by a star at the northern end of the Milky Way where it divides, after which they are sent 'southwards' on one arm or another. It would indeed be an ideal cosmic situation for the abode of souls who have yet to be reborn to life immortal. The presence of two rivers converging at this point evokes the confluence as a Centre, echoing those of the 'islands-with-fountains' of Circe and Kalypso, as well as the Ithakan 'Cave of the Nymphs' near the home of Penelope and Odysseus. A context for places of convergence such as those described in the *Iliad* (voyage of Priam to the gates of the Underworld, the topography of the Troad and convergence of Simoeis and Skamandros, which is reiterated in the architecture of Olympia) have all been used to signal the relevance of Homer's White Rock. Now we have the opportunity to relate this celestial convergence of the Milky Way's rivers to the mouth of Hades gained by Odysseus, travelling along the river of Ocean from the island of Circe.

'Falling into Death'

The White Rock has already been suggested as a place of transformation, the 'souls' jumping off place'.[4] West is the direction of death, since it witnesses the daily fall of the Sun. In relation to 'west', the rock is east or centre. But Gates of the Sun could lie at any of the major points of change along the ecliptic, as well as beside those which are chiefly cardinal.

Nagy interprets the 'Gates of the Sun' of book 24 as the 'Gates of the Underworld'.[5] This identification accords well with the idea that an adjacent rock serves as a place where body and soul alike 'fall into death'.

The rock, as a marker of a significant place on the ecliptic identified with the *omphalos*-point, makes close neighbours of Sun, rock and gates; they may be considered as joint markers of the opening into another world. This interpretation would help to unravel a difficult fragment of Alcman's *Partheneion*[6] describing a wonderful horse which emerges "from out of those dreams underneath the rock." A specific rock may have been imagined. If the "country of dreams" may be envisaged as lying *under* the White Rock of *Odyssey* 24, (11-13), then a fresh detail may be added to the Homeric topography of the Underworld entrance; the pathway followed by Hermes and the souls may be descending along a vertical path successively way-marked by Ocean, Rock, Gates, "country of dreams" and finally the "meadow of asphodel" as marker to a point of transition on the *axis*.

The symbolism of the axis articulates the fact that soul can only descend as far as the centre, and must ascend from there along the same path.[7] It is impossible to travel any further without this reversal. It is therefore advanced with some confidence that Odysseus journeyed from the home of Circe along some form of celestial bridge, and from there excavated his cubit-square pit (10, 517) and looked down into "the moldering home of Hades" (512), which would be the abyss (*Apsu*) of cosmic underworld waters, to be seen again later in all its horror at the base of the Charybdis whirlpool. He is looking into the darkness which may open where the starry rivers of the Way divide, and further, because he is looking down into the dark abyss beyond and below the safe confines of the bridge. Following the law of the *axis* which permits descent to the centre point but no further, he can now only retrace his steps along the path already followed. And since the same prohibition does not affect the rising path, we are confirmed in our supposition that Circe's home must lie in the north of the northern hemisphere, 'above' and at a high point in respect of the *axis*.

As a secondary effect, the theory explains why immortals and men require separate entrances into the Cave of the Nymphs. In their condition as 'men', humans in an early stage of initiation will undertake the southward voyage from the north towards the 'centre', i.e. they will enter the doorway facing the north wind. At a later stage of the journey, they will be in a position to enter via the south-facing gate, for if Odysseus' travels provide the model, they will have completed the circle and arrived at the southern doorway. At that point, and on account of their survival in the face of all the challenges put in their way, they will have accomplished their spiritual voyage; *now* they are fit to be considered one of the

"immortals" and may take the first steps on the rising path which should carry them without break to the Land of the Blessed.

The Hades (or its doorway) to which Circe the gatekeeper of the upper *axis* has sent Odysseus, lies in the middle of the night sky. It may be anticipated that the road to Paradise which must by the law of contrarieties rise from the southern entrance will follow the same axial path but will rise without encountering the horrors of the Underworld. Perhaps it too will lead to the very same rock, or its original, a brilliant star such as Deneb.

Circe's Island Defined by Time and Place

Odysseus' residence with Circe is to end when the companions become anxious to be home. This came about at the September equinox, or sometime soon after:

> "There for all our days until a year was completed
> we sat there feasting on unlimited meat and sweet wine.
> But when it was the end of a year, and the months wasted
> away, and the seasons changed, and the long days were accomplished,
> then my eager companions called me aside and said to me:
> "What ails you now?" (10, 467-472, emphasis added).

Whether the full year in Circe's residence began near the time of the summer solstice ("long days"), or at the equinoctial onset of autumn ("long days accomplished"), or at some point between the two, the stay ended one full year later. The interlude comprised of one year with Circe and her household thus consists of a full revolution of the Sun through all the houses of the Zodiac, the course which brings the Sun back to its point of departure. The poet is so intent on impressing upon his audience the completion of the year, that in these few lines such a fulfilment is noted three times or more. The passage says, in effect, "this is where we came in", thus providing a counterpart to Odysseus' narration of the completion of his Adventures which begins and ends with the visit to Kalypso.

A remarkable event occurs soon after his arrival on Aiaia. He loses sight of his guiding Sun.

Eclipse

Circe's dwelling as an island moving between the solstice and equinox points is fully relevant to Odysseus' apparent loss of direction, when neither the place of the dark nor the place of the light can be defined (10,

190ff.). This question has so stretched the imagination of Homer's students since archaic times that many scholars have resorted, with no more than limited success, to a terrestrial geography regarding hours of darkness at the North Pole. If however the problem is addressed at the most basic level, by asking how in the early years of Mediterranean expansion a traveller would find his way by land or sea, the answer will be "by measuring the Sun by day, or by finding the North Pole Star at night". Other indicators are less reliable: the Milky Way is not always visible, the winds do not blow consistently and their character is open to conflicting interpretation. It is quite impossible for Odysseus to have had a compass, for these would not be invented for many centuries, nor are we told of any primitive map that has been mislaid. The solution can only be a three-dimensional one which uses the only map which travels with the voyager: travellers must look by day for the position of the Sun in the sky or find the Pole Star by night.

The day had dawned fair on the third day of their landing, soon after the sailors had been guided inshore by a kindly god, we are told (10, 140ff.). A magnificent stag is destined soon to fall to the spear of Odysseus who has wandered the island, prudently estimating the lie of the land. A fine feast is in the offing, but perhaps the observation that "the fierce strength of the sun was on him" (the stag) which categorises the noble beast as a solar creature was as relevant to the gods, and to fate, as the cattle of Thrinakia, whom the men were to eat at their peril. Their leader exhibits his mastery of the bow by felling the great creature who steps so opportunely into his path. But at the dawn assembly that follows the day of the feast (187f.) the leader has some dreadful news for his companions. It is not possible to find their way. The Sun as an indicator of direction has been obscured:

> "…we do not know where the darkness is nor the sunrise,
> nor where the sun who shines upon the people rises, nor where
> he sets…" (10, 190ff.)

Neither the Sun's east nor west can be detected, and even more oddly, no darkness is present either, though this may be a reference to the west. So it has been day, but is day no more, light is no longer giving light when it should do. No Sun shines to show the travellers their present location. Without knowledge of his bearings, no individual can know himself as a man centred within Time and Creation, and that being so the structure of existence is lost.

The interpreter may profitably work through the problem from a cosmic viewpoint. The conditions given do not fully correspond with the

perpetual six-month night of the Arctic, but they do offer a match with an *eclipse of the Sun*, which as we have noted, may occur at the head of the dragon which coincides with Cancer, Circe's very own solstice place. Odysseus' disorientation through the obscuration of the Sun is cast in remarkably similar terms in a hymn of the *Rg Veda* addressed to Surya, the Sun goddess. The Vedic sky-watchers were well acquainted with the eclipses and integrated them into their mythic astronomy from an early date:

> "O Surya, when the Asura's descendant, Svarbhanu, pierced thee through and through with darkness,
> All creatures looked like one who is bewildered, *who knoweth not the place where he is standing.*"[8] (emphasis added)

Svarbhanu is the eclipse-causing demon, later Rahu, so the Vedic eclipse in question is taking place at the northern lunar node which is also that of Circe. The hymnist is referring to the loss of sacred daylight which brings about the disorientation of every creature under the Sun. This relatively rare event is known to cast terror in the heart of those unprepared for the loss of sunlight by day. In such conditions it is impossible to use the *gnomon* or shadow stick to determine the height and position of the Sun. In daytime, moreover, the north polar star is not to be seen. All the normal markers of time and place are annulled when the Sun and Moon come into their seemingly destructive conjunction. Soon after, we know, the hero will have to pass towards Hades through the dark and misty country of the Kimmerians, who also it seems suffer from an absence of light under the direct axial line running from the point of eclipse over the island of Circe to the Hadean centre.

Circe's home is confirmed, yet again, at the head of the dragon, the lunar node of the north, where eclipses may occur. Therefore a substantial body of evidence points to a location for Circe's island at the juncture of Moon, Earth and (eclipsing) Sun in the summer solstice, when it meets the rising path of the Milky Way, most likely high in the noon zenith, at the time when the Sun has reached its highest annual point in the northern hemisphere. This space coincides with the Anti-Galactic Centre.

Close by in the house of Taurus huddle the stars of the Pleiades, and the Hyades too, who are often associated with pigs. These are perhaps the originals of the "pigs…holed up in the close pig pens" who were the human sailing companions of Odysseus until released by his subjugation of Circe (10, 283). We remember also the good servant Eumaios, a swineherd keeping a well-ordered pigsty, who once dwelt on the solstice island of Syria ("where the Sun makes his turnings" 15, 404). And what

should one make of the great stag felled by Odysseus the hunter, who uses his bow for the first time in this narrative (though his bowmanship will be displayed again to good effect when the time comes to engage the suitors in a struggle to the death). Close to the constellation of Gemini lies the bright figure of Orion, the hunter, whose arrow fells the stag. A mighty figure in world mythology and visible in the winter skies of the northern hemisphere, but perpetually 'chased' out of sight by Scorpio rising in summer,[9] Orion 'is' the cultural prototype (according to De Santillana and von Dechend) of Samson, Osiris, Nimrod, and Japanese Susanowo, while the stag 'is' Kronos, Yama or Prometheus.[10] To follow the authors of *Hamlet's Mill* along these labyrinthine paths would take us too far from our objective, so we will merely note in passing that if Odysseus the hunter is 'a Samson' through association with a common factor (Orion), he is by further association involved with Precession, which in the case of the Biblical Samson involved the pulling down of the pillars of the house by one already blinded by his enemies. As for Osiris, he was killed by his enemy and shut up in the trunk of a tree, from which was later made an 'ark' which carried him over the waters of the cosmic sea.

Circe and her entourage have occupied us for long enough. There is still much to explore in the country of her sister-guardian, Kalypso.

More Caves and Trees

Kalypso's island is a paradise in comparison with Circe's. No men are bestially transformed there; instead, the well-appointed cave and its surroundings, lush with growth and fragrant with cedar wood are known only to the goddess, her lover, and Hermes the visiting deity. Nesting birds delight the eye and a flourishing vine promises good refreshment, as do the four shining streams running "in sundry directions" (5, 71). The *Odyssey*'s 'streams in a garden' share an idea in common with the Edenic paradise of the Old Testament (which bears trees of both life and knowledge). In the Hebrew paradise the *axis mundi* tree is rooted in the *omphalos* garden (of fertility) in just the same way as Kalypso's vine in her flower-laden cave at the navel of the sea. In the Biblical instance, the presence of *two* trees interprets that outflow of divine energy which immediately divides into pairs of complementary opposites of which all life forms and abstractions are composed (life and death, male and female, good and evil, and so on).

On the fertile island of Scheria paired olive trees, one wild, one cultivated, hence contrary opposites (5, 476-485) were so grown together in that place that they seemed as one, and being capable of withstanding

all forms of extreme weather, provided the sheltering 'cradle' to the naked, shipwrecked Odysseus. It is no surprise to find that these trees grow in a wood "close to the water" (475) even though Odysseus has left the river and walked uphill ("up the slope", 470) to the forest with its dense bushes. It is unlikely that this 'forest water' could be the river by which Odysseus was carried ashore; that being so, the two trees are probably intended to grow next to a spring on the hillside. Moreover, the elevated tone of the lines in which the paired trees are described is as lyrical as if the poet were describing the temperate, timeless climate of Olympos itself. No Sun nor rain nor wet-blowing wind can pierce the interlacing walls of these two antithetical trees (which are translated variously as shrub and olive, or wild and cultivated olive). The underlying sense is that of an *omphalos* place whose divine qualities are expressed through exceptional growth, just as it is in the paradise myth of Genesis. As with the Biblical form, the 'sheltering trees by the water' mark a place of personal transformation for better or worse: worse in the case of Adam and Eve, whose consumption of the apple led to their expulsion via a (cosmic?) gate guarded by a sword-waving Cherubim, but better in the case of Odysseus who slept and was renewed like "a seed of fire" in his magical shelter (490).

This cross-cultural analogy raises questions concerning the function of the cave of Kalypso, which is also marked by multiform tokens of the combined *axis mundi* and *omphalos*: a vine, bearing grapes and wound about the cave set among a 'forest' of alder, poplar and cypress, where birds of sky and sea nest together, and a cave close to four streams which nourish meadows of parsley and violets. The streams in the paradisal garden are the strongest marker of the Centre as a point where directions meet that Homer has left us. Moreover, the "great fire blazing on the hearth" (59) can be read as the heat of the divine force that animates the *axis* at the centre point of the *omphalos*. It has a parallel in the fire that hardened the point of the stake-mast which pierced the eye of Polyphemos. Therefore Kalypso's cavern corresponds to the biblical model of Eden *and* the sheltering trees on Scheria in that it, too, will finally prove to be a place of transformation for the hero. In fact, it is only at an *omphalos* that a soul may find the ascending route to Heaven or the opening into Hades, and having already made his journey of descent (from Circe) Odysseus is now about to be released from another *omphalos*-centre, by Kalypso, to make that perilous ascent to the north which will carry him home to Ithaka.

Immortality and Centrality

The hospitable goddess Kalypso proves to be just as selfishly devoted to her lover as was Circe before her. She succeeds in detaining him for seven years and is most reluctant to allow him to go. She has so much to offer him, she complains, whilst reluctantly accepting the command of the gods to set him free:

> "…I gave him my love and cherished him, and I had hopes also
> that I could make him immortal and all his days to be endless." (5,135f.)

Perhaps it is now possible to understand how the gift of immortality could lie in the hands of Kalypso but not in those of Circe. Both have been described as occupying *omphalos*-points of transition. Kalypso's territory is characterised by forests of trees, fragrant abundance and the flocks of birds which can lift the soul; in many ways, it comes close in productivity to the garden of Alkinoös. 'Timelessness' (which is a thematic element in the development of certain places deemed to be connected to the *axis*: the playground of Persephone, Olympos, or the temple of Zeus on Mount Lykaion, for example) bears clear affinity with immortality: it is Time which causes ageing and decay, so the absence of Time will preserve in perpetuity. If Kalypso *is* true to her word and can grant immortality, it may be because she already occupies a timeless place as a timeless being. Moreover, her *omphalos* home appears to be the position from which the ascent of the soul begins. Once that ascent is accomplished, successful reintegration into new life may follow.

Rivers and Streams; Deluges at the End of the World

Kalypso's island is sea-washed Ogygia, and her cave a source of freshwater springs. The name 'Ogygia' contains as yet unsolved resonances which may link it, for one, to the land of a mythic king of Boeotia or Attica named Ogyges and reputedly the founder of Thebes in Greece, during whose reign a great flood occurred. The association of Ogygia as a place of many waters, and 'Ogygian' with such flood waters as those named for the king Ogyges, together with the sense attributed to the word by Liddell and Scott, namely 'primeval' or 'of the earliest dawn' leads into the wider mythology of the 'uprooting of the tree' or the 'breaking of the mill shaft', all common and universal metaphors of that precessional event which causes a destructive irruption of waters at the dawn of a New Age ("*earliest* dawn"). Hesiod spoke of oaths sworn by the gods on "the eternal and primaeval ('Ogygian') water of Styx to be: and it

spouts through a rugged place".[11] Similarly, Kalypso reveals her connection to the same 'supernatural' water when she makes her oath of sincerity to Odysseus in the name of "the dripping water of the Styx" (5, 185). *Any* cosmic navel opens the way to flood waters, so it is no wonder that Kalypso's island displays certain ties to such a mythic detail now largely lost to the modern reader, namely the precise nature and meaning of 'Ogygia' and its relationship with the Styx, and for that matter, the rock or rocks which may encompass that blocking stone which holds back the 'river', the destructive flood. Whatever they mean, the Ogygian name under which they shelter evokes darkness and death as well as the Underworld and a destructive new phase in the course of Time. Certainly an oath taken in the name of the Styx, or an Ogygian equivalent related to a great destructive flood would, if broken, have the most terrible consequence imaginable: the destruction of all life on this planet.

The appearance of similar floods in other European and Near Eastern 'Quest' literature indicates the antiquity and relevance of the theme. When Vainamoinen, the sage of the *Kalevala* epic, sailed his copper boat into the maelstrom (whirlpool) he fell into the depths of the sea which are at the same time the lowest regions of the heavens.[12] This Scandinavian epic has preserved an oral tradition of a marine underworld associated with death and transformation very similar to the *Odyssey*'s. In like manner, the hero's journey in search of immortality in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* took him to the house of Utnapishtim, who had saved his own life by building an ark to preserve himself and his wife from the floods. This is the privileged being who will supply Gilgamesh with the plant which preserves or transforms life.

Odysseus could have made good use of such a vessel as that sailed by Utnapishtim when the storm winds struck as he and his companions left Thrinakia, leaving behind its dreadful death-portents of crawling skins and bellowing meat on spits (12, 393-425). At that moment of departure, the West Wind hit the ship, "screaming", and snapped the two forestays that held up the mast. Here, the mast is functioning as an unequivocal image of the *axis* of the world, and the forestays correspond to the great girths that uphold Plato's cosmic vessel.[13] The mast that "went over backwards", killing the steersman and knocking him into the sea, is the very image of the World Pillar that 'falls' when the universe makes its great shift through space. Moreover, the steersman's fall is also effected *backwards*, Homer tells us, which is equally true of the precessional shift which drives the equinoxes westwards, against the usual eastward path of the Sun through the houses of the Zodiac.

The reader is left in no doubt that the storm accompanies a maelstrom on the surface of the sea, for the ship is thrown *spinning in a circle*, "and all was full of brimstone" (416f.) With violence (thunder and lightning), with fire (brimstone) and with a vortex opening in the waters, the world of Odysseus' all-too mortal companions comes to an end, and a New Age is set in motion at this dreadful precessional moment. Only the eponymous hero survives, so he it is who must witness the dawn of a New Age of the world. Finally the winds abate and he is carried uneventfully to the home of Kalypso, 'riding the new *axis*' which he has improvised from mast pole and keel (420-425). The lashing is a "backstay made out of oxhide" (423), which in view of the many subtle indicators that particular skins preserve life,[14] is sufficient to indicate that this man is fated to live and return.

Kalypso at the Centre of the Galaxy

It is now possible to appreciate why Kalypso should dwell in a cave at 'the navel of the sea', "*omphalos thalasses"*. Three distinct elements of meaning are encoded in this brief phrase. Firstly, Kalypso's cave lies in or under the cosmic sea far beyond the Earth's land and oceans. Under or below implies south and the antithesis of the northerly point of divine origin in Heaven. Like nearly all entrances to the Underworld it constitutes an opening or fissure in the ground (a cavern) and this is our second observation. Thirdly, as a navel, the cave is a centre in terms of the cosmic body, an idea reinforced by the outpouring of four streams from a single point, as in the Garden of Eden. The abundance of the flora and fauna associated with the cave further indicate this as a place of life and 'coming into being', whilst on Circe's island men are reduced to bestial status, hence 'dead to themselves'. The Underworld location (not subterranean, but sub-oceanic) is more beautiful than Circe's northern home on the Tropic of Cancer, and promises immortality, while the 'upper world' associated with Circe proves the more ugly and dangerous. The whole schema is however completely in line with the message of Homer's Cave of the Nymphs, where men or the fathers must enter from the north, gain the Cave, then (one assumes) can only turn about in order to progress back to the north. From the south, however, the immortals (or perhaps the 'immortalised') entering the Cave of the Nymphs would have free passage to the north, and this is the case in which Odysseus now finds himself as he prepares to leave the southerly cave of Kalypso.

The island in the sea is 'superior' to the isle of Circe in all but its directional (i.e. chthonic) associations. Few reach Ogygia, it would seem, but many do find their way to Circe, and to their bitter cost. But those few

who are welcomed by Kalypso appear to have earned the right to far greater rewards: immortality, passage to Scheria or to Ithaka, the very opposite of the journey to Hades and return to Circe. There is no question of a journey to the Centre and return to Kalypso to match the voyage from Circe to Hades and back again. The hero travels painfully but directly from one well-furbished and benign island home to another, Ogygia to Scheria, without diverting to any other place or encountering any other living beings until he espies the delightful Nausikaa, the very embodiment of youth and nubile promise.

Subjected to Kalypso's close mentorship, Odysseus dwells seven years in an island paradise. These are the closing stages of the soul journey, and it can, it seems, only be effected from the Zodiac home of Sagittarius near Capricorn and the winter solstice point, which has the potential to coincide with the foot of the Rainbow or the midpoint of the Milky Way, and where lies the great Galactic Centre, the dark bulge at the heart of the galaxy which looks so much like a cave. Of all possible mystic Centres, the centre of the galaxy itself must far outclass any other.

It is clear that Circe's island is *not* the home of the gods. She, like Kalypso, merely provides a solstice turning point or terminus where souls may leave the ecliptic wheel of existence ('changing trains') and join a greater highway such as the Milky Way arching over all else. (The galaxy, of which the visible Way forms only a part, we now recognise as containing all the stars and wandering planets of our visible universe, as well as our own solar system). Precisely what has emerged from this lengthy digression is the existence of two distinct routes to the Afterlife. One bears the imprint of Circe, and the other is guarded by Kalypso.

The ancient Indian doctrine of these 'Two Paths' contains some details highly relevant to the roles of Circe and Kalypso. So this would seem an appropriate place to set the two goddesses and their ways into the wider historical context of prehistoric thought.

The Two Paths

To reiterate: two exits and / or entrances marked separate routes out of or into the Cave of the Nymphs (13, 109-112). Homer describes separate entrances, of which the first facing the north wind is for men, or 'people' in Lattimore's translation, and the second toward the south wind is used by beings whom the poet describes as having more divinity. The south-facing gate is for "immortals". Common sense suggests that the entrance facing the north provides a path towards the south, and that entrance from the south will direct the traveller northwards.

Whatever the case, the cave and its separate thresholds interpret an idea close to the Vedic doctrine of two spiritual paths, one of which, the path of the *pitri* (fathers or ancestors, which must be the people to whom Homer refers) and another path, the *devayana*, which belongs to the gods, *deva*. At some stage in the development of Hindu thinking moral determinism enters the scene, and the gods in question are then revealed as the souls of men *made immortal* by their perfection in life; here we may recognise Odysseus and his kind. Of the two *ayanas* or paths, that of the fathers begins in the north and leads to (undesirable) rebirth, while that of the 'gods' beginning in the south carries the godly along a brighter path via the Sun, to salvation. The *pitriyana* (route of the men or fathers) follows the course of the Sun from autumn equinox to spring equinox the following year, that is, the winter course (September to March). The *devayana* (route of the gods) travels with the Sun through its summer phase from spring to autumn.

The Indian doctrine of the two paths has as many complexities as Homer's Cave of the Nymphs, but since both involve the relationship of paths and a point of entry, it is well worth pursuing.[15] The 'gate of men' begins in the north and leads to the *pitriyana*; it is the gate of the summer solstice in Cancer, while the gate of the gods begins in the south and leads to the *devayana*; this is the gate of the winter solstice in Capricorn. From these two solstice positions the Sun will descend from Cancer towards the winter solstice and the other will rise from Capricorn to the summer solstice. From whichever direction he enters, the being will exit according to the spiritual degree attained; it is the exit not the entrance which is most significant. So the one who travels the southward road of the fathers (men), the *pitriyana*, will need to re-enter the cave if he fails to change condition; on the *devayana,* in contrast, only those who have 'made the grade' will emerge into the higher world. This is the vital point; one of these two gates is an entry *and* an exit, while the other is a final exit.[16] Although Guénon makes no mention of the gates of Circe and Kalypso, the situation he describes is exactly that advanced here, which allocates Circe to the Cancer gate and Kalypso to the Capricorn gate, from which Odysseus is liberated into the bright upper world of Scheria. And he never returns to Kalypso.

Gradually directions of movement which are defined separately by three different but related fields, namely the myth of the cosmic tree or pillar, and certain terms of reference of a cosmic eschatology (which is based on a cosmic geography), and the journey of Odysseus to the pit of Hades from which he returns to Circe and the gate of Cancer, are coming together to support and confirm an ancient doctrine of the way to the

Afterlife. A small adjustment to the description of the Cave of Nymphs (which speaks of the southern entrance as the privilege of "immortals") which interprets these, not as divinities but men made immortal by their own endeavours, is all that is required to bring the Ithakan cave in line with the message of the circular journey and the Indian doctrine of the Two Paths.

One might also mention a further distinction between the paths by which the *pitriyana* became known as the 'path of smoke' and the *devayana*, the 'path of fire'. The *Bhagavad Gita* explains the several oppositional indicators: "Smoke, night, the dark half of the Moon, the six months of the southern passage of the Sun – then departing, the Yogi reaches the lunar light and returns". (Man gains the Moon and then falls back into mortal being). This is the Circe path, which involves movement into winter and a return along the route already travelled.

"Fire, light, day-time, the bright half of the Moon and the six months of the northern path of the Sun – then departing, the knowers of Brahman reach Brahman."[17] (The enlightened one merges with the divinity, imitating the Sun in its ascending phase, and enters no more into the chain of existence). We note that the divinity is not here identified with the Sun, even though his path is solar to a degree; Brahman is *other* than the Sun. He is pure consciousness beyond. But this route allows of no falling back: it is the straight route followed by Odysseus from the island of Kalypso.

Following Kalypso's 'path' the hero came at last to Scheria and Ithaka. Leaving Circe, he had not at that point escaped from the slavery of human existence; so he 'falls back'. Can it be mere coincidence that Kalypso's cave contained a blazing cedar wood *fire* whose scent "spread all over the island" (5, 58-61) whilst Circe's halls merely gave out a column of *smoke* which was merely "going up…through undergrowth and forest" (10,149f.)?

We have only to consider the Cave of the Nymphs as a pointer to the cave of Kalypso for the inferences to fall into place. Kalypso marks the way to Heaven and immortality, whilst Circe directs the soul to Hades and further trials of strength, and their ways are to be distinguished as *devayana* and *pitriyana* respectively. Again, from the *Bhagavad Gita* we learn: "These two paths of the world, the bright and the dark, are considered to be eternal; proceeding by one of them, one reaches the supreme state from which there is no return. Proceeding by the other, one returns to the mortal world and becomes subject to birth and death once more."

These are the opposing paths of *no return* or immortality (bright) and *return to mortality* (dark). Both at this stage in the evolution of Hindu philosophy are now 'paths of men' allocated according to the type and

achievements of the individual soul. This understanding gives extraordinary resonance to the overarching theme of the *Odyssey*: namely *nostos* as 'return', which is narrated as a return to Ithaka on the narrative level but in all probability refers mystically to a return to life and light.[18]

One of the most interesting aspects of the *Bhagavad Gita* text quoted above is the association of oppositional pathways which lead either to the *day and the Sun*, the summer phase of the ecliptic, or to *night and the Moon*, the winter phase of the Sun's journey. The same phenomenon, we noted, was registered by Roger Beck in his analysis of the roles of the Sun and Moon in a Mithraic context, as agents of descent and ascent of the human soul.[19] In fact, he is of the opinion that the Tauroctony contains an allegory of eclipse, and that the striking of the bull ('Moon') by Mithras ('Sun') at the centre of a line drawn slantwise, eastward and southward, marks the centre point of the soul journey along a cosmic route map. This line indicates the path Cancer to Crater (a star in the constellation of Sagittarius).[20]

The *Vishnu Purana* is rather more explicit, naming the pilgrims' point of departure on the *pitriyana* as the two lunar asterisms *Mula* and *Purvashadha,* which both lie in the area of the constellation Sagittarius. The path of the Hindu mystics also begins here but it travels northwards along the ecliptic and beyond it. The travellers are purified in the star Agni which lies at the juncture of Taurus and Gemini (the Anti-Galactic Centre, and Circe's territory) before proceeding to the Big Dipper and Pole Star. Their mystical journey takes them onward and upward to the wind and the Sun and the Moon, but further than this is very hard to conceive, we learn: it is a flashing of supernatural light, a mystery, possibly the presence of the Supernal. Finally, the soul is received into the cosmic waters and is become fully cosmic.

Parallelism between North and South

We remarked that in Circe's northern location, Odysseus slays the mighty deer, which might well identify him with the constellation of Orion the hunter. The three stars in the belt of Orion point to the star Capella (alpha Auriga) directly north, a star known in Indic tradition as the 'heart of Brahma' and the great spiritual centre of power in the Zodiac. In fact, this area of the skies is the most positive and auspicious for the Vedic thinker. It is home to the creator god Prajapati, father of all the gods. In the Americas, the Aztecs came to a similar conclusion: for them, the stars in Orion's belt were the 'three hearthstones' in the dwelling of the Creator.[21]

Yet the southern constellations of the Milky Way and tail of the dragon (Kalypso) are alike in having a hunter figure who draws a bow against his enemies: Sagittarius. The intention in projecting matching figures on to opposite parts of the heavens may have come about through a common human desire to enforce the symmetry found everywhere in nature, as in the oppositions day / night, hot / cold, life / or death, etc., but the Indic parallels go further: northern Prajapati is matched by southern Rudra, who is also a father of the gods, but in his case, possesses a destructive power with the strength to transform. Rudra has among his sacred animals a deer.

As for Scorpio, he is known in the *Rg Veda* as a source of poison who trails misfortune in his wake. The two stars in his 'sting' form the constellation *Mula*. Is this perhaps the mysterious herb *moly*, which Hermes presents to Odysseus as an antidote to the narcotic powers of Circe? Hermes is the great travelling messenger of the gods who bestrides the universe, so perhaps it was originally from the other side, near the island of Kalypso, that the god plucked the magical plant, despite the fact that it appears to grow just where Odysseus is standing in the house of Circe (10, 303). If so, this would be entirely in keeping with the series of antitheses that we have been encountering throughout this chapter, and the ancient traditions of astronomy and astrology which balance one house against its diametric opposite. Kalypso and Circe as we have so often said are the same but different; east or west, north or south; Galactic Centre or Anti-Centre; head or tail of the dragon; top or bottom of the Milky Way. Nevertheless they are locked in a parallelism which reiterates the universal principle of the One and the Many which must first enter manifestation via the division of the One into Two. Via their flying shuttle or their confronted solstice locations, and their matching relationships with Odysseus, they hold the cosmic frame in balance. Thus it is logical in the archaic mind-set that *Mula*, the 'good poison' or 'effective remedy' of Kalypso will balance the degrading, shape-shifting drugs of Circe. It is an antidote, just as the Galactic Centre has its Anti-Centre in the house of Gemini in Cancer.

So, like the spiritually advanced mystic of Indian aspiration, or the intelligent 'philosopher' Plato would elevate to the highest destiny, Odysseus sets out northwards or towards the zenith. Perhaps his journey will no longer halt at the point when it encounters the ecliptic, for there are some attractive stars outside the ecliptic never obscured by the Sun and nearly always visible to the naked eye. One of these could be a candidate for the fortunate land of the Phaiakians. Whether a stellar homeland for Ithaka is to be found also remains to be seen, and since the entire epic is

predicated on the *nostos* of the hero, only the discovery of an appropriate 'island' in the cosmic sea will complete and confirm the sequence.

PART IV:

THE CENTRAL HEAVENS

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PARADISAL SCHERIA AND THE STILLING OF TIME

Odysseus will have his moment in the rose garden on the paradise-island of Scheria, and that moment may very well arrive at T. S. Eliot's timeless place lying at "the still point of the turning world".[1] But first there is one last stage to the journey, and a hard road it proves to be for the luckless traveller. The way to eternal life lies beyond the Sun. This is the simple message found in the earliest religious texts to have survived in accessible form, the Indic *Vedas*. Once one has penetrated the dense thickets of Vedic metaphor the message often reiterated is clear and simple: the worshipper (known as the comprehensor) will follow the axial route upwards, in its symbolism of thread, breath, pillar, tree, drink, or the mysterious *Soma* (which embraces all the preceding items). Whether passing through the gates of death, the World Door, a hole in the sky, or the aperture at the crown of the head, dying as one repeatedly dead and reborn, or transiting in bodily form, the path of the soul lies "through the midst of the Sun."[2] Everything under the shadow of the Sun (i.e. in the phenomenal world) suffers change (mortality)[3] whereas those who 'climb' the axial tree or pillar, as the shaman climbs in imagination and ecstasy, will gain the world of the gods, the *devas*. It is a matter of finding the all-important "seventh ray" which passes through the Sun. The seventh ray will issue from the point where all other lines indicating direction cross and converge, to create a perfect vertical.[4] The directions indicated by the several lines will create a unity which points the way to the extra-cosmic realm beyond the Sun, in a remote, other zenith far beyond the zenith visible from Earth as the midday station of the Sun.[5] To summarise from the previous chapters, Odysseus (as 'man' or 'father' or 'ancestor') encountered solar gateways at the solstice gates of the Zodiac in Cancer, which allow exit from the cosmos of the manifested world along the *pitriyana,* but *not* passage to the eternal Beyond; the gods' gateway, on the other hand, is to be found at Capricorn at the opposite extreme from Cancer, where the path of the gods opens: this is the *devayana* which corresponds to the gateway lying at the home of Kalypso. We left the hero

with Kalypso in her watery underworld at the navel of the (cosmic) sea which corresponds with the sky of the southern hemisphere; the hero has now constructed a simple craft, a heaven-seeking boat, from the heaven-seeking trees "that towered to the heaven" (5, 239) on the shores of Ogygia. Once the connection is made between the trees as spiritual *axes* and the wooden parts of Odysseus' boat, the encoded content of the storm that follows emerges from the surface narrative. The hero is about to depart from the root-place of the *axis mundi*.

Building and Sailing the Raft

Hesiod's Tartarus and the Homeric lower world have offered some clues that both or either may lie in the dark underside of the Earth, whether the latter be visualised as a flat plane or a three-dimensional globe. There are some stars of great magnitude in the skies of this southern hemisphere, some of which are occasionally visible in the latitudes of Greece and for a longer period in Egypt. Inevitably they have entered into myth in personified form or as significant objects. Foremost among these star groups is one which may be the model for the ship on which Odysseus made his way from Kalypso to his next island. The greatest constellation of the southern skies is known as the Argo Navis, a configuration so extensive that it is nowadays divided into three parts. Tradition identifies the outlines of a great ship, whose keel (Carina), stern (Puppis) and sail (Vela) are marked out by bright stars. Any discussion of the place of stellar Argo in early mythology will need to address the semantic links not only between Argos as the dog of Odysseus and the 'dog stars' in Canis Major (Sirius), and Canopus, 'eye of the dog', but also the multiple connections between Argo as an Ark, whether one refers to the Ark of Noah or the Ark of Utnapishtim (*Gilgamesh*) which both ride great floods, or the barque of Osiris the ruler of the Underworld, who was also 'encoffined' in a boat-like chest and cast out to sea. Moses cast away in a boat of rushes is another case in point. Jason and his Argonauts, Noah, Gilgamesh and Osiris are all implicated in myth as seekers after immortality or life's renewal, and dangerous adventures on the high seas are common to all. It is therefore entirely in keeping for the stormy intermediate stage between Odysseus' departure from Ogygia and his safe arrival on Scheria to begin in the southern skies, where Nature has provided a ready-made 'ship of salvation'. There is little space to pursue this idea at this stage of the research, but it is worth noting that there is at least one Argonautic noble 'ship of the skies' which rises from the

invisible underside of the Earth and rides at night across the northern firmament.

The humble 'raft' of Odysseus may be a cosmic vehicle intended to carry a hero possessing equally cosmic powers. Homer relates in great detail the oath drawn from Kalypso before the enterprise could begin, as well as the materials and tools required for the construction of a seaworthy craft. Emphasis is laid upon the great double-edged bronze axe (a major symbol in Minoan iconography and probably an axial token of power) and the olive wood of the handle which evokes the presence of Athene (who, it will be remembered, provided the 'speaking prow' of the Argo from the oak of Dodona). Disbelief stirs when we read that the "raft" has a bottom "as great as is the bottom of a broad cargo-carrying / ship" (5,249f.), for all this is accomplished by one man in only four days. But then like Athene herself, he is a superlative craftsman, a *deus faber:* all his timbers were "trued…straight to a chalkline" (23, 196f.) just like the olive tree bedpost at his home in Ithaka, and straightness of this kind can only mean truth, justice, balance, all the qualities of the *axis mundi*. His skills are not merely great in human terms; it is hinted that they are gifts from the gods, so perhaps his ship is the Argo Navis[6] itself, whose beam must surely outclass any ship ever built in a terrestrial shipyard. That mighty ship of the sky can still be seen at night in the spring, as it rides from east to west just above the southern horizon and largely within the band of the Milky Way. Before the precessional shift, much more of the constellation would have been visible to ancient navigators in the northern hemisphere.

'Keeping the Bear on the Left'

Well-provisioned, Odysseus left his hostess lamenting and with a following wind steered his way by the great circumpolar star, the Bear, which "is never plunged in the wash of the Ocean" (*Iliad* 18, 489). The instruction to keep the Bear on his left hand side reveals that his destination lies seventeen days' sailing *east* of Ogygia. This is no problem to our argument, since Kalypso occupies a 'floating' location that alternates between the west (where Aiolos' own 'floating island' is also to be found) and the south or Underworld side of the globe. (The Galactic Centre travels with the Milky Way as it slides below the horizon). So if he leaves his hostess while she stands at her westerly point, Odysseus' departure will involve a dual separation as Kalypso's territory moves away and below. At some point the easterly route of the homemade craft is to be interrupted, as we shall shortly explain, by a confluence of the winds which will lift him out of the water in the course of a storm ("I fear that

once again the whirlwind will snatch me / and carry me out on the sea", 5, 419f.).

In this book, book 5, Odysseus is steering, sleeplessly and as instructed by Kalypso, by the Great Bear, the Pleiades and "late-setting" Boötes" (272f.). An observer may easily note that Boötes sets in the west at dusk ("late" in the day) just at the moment the Pleiades rise in the east at dawn, and vice versa; they are balanced like a pair of scales in the sky (rather like the balanced arm of the flying shuttle of Circe and Kalypso). At night the traveller may steer by the Pleiades until they fall into the west, when Boötes will reappear in the east to become his subsequent guide. Only in March and September do they coincide, and these are the equinoctial times of equal day and night. From the evidence of the storms that ensue, a September sailing is the more likely of the two with the voyage apparently taking place late in the year. The naming of the Bear (north) in the same context as Boötes and the Pleiades (alternately at west and east, then eastern and western points on the horizon) provides a set of three co-ordinates which should make it possible to follow any course in the northern hemisphere, but especially one leading north under the guidance of the Great Bear. The north wind that should in theory blow the raft away from the island does not do so; it works more positively, battening down the seas in front of the swimmer whose only protection once his raft has been broken and dispersed is the veil of Ino (370-387). It is feasible that the wind sent by the goddess Athene after she has "fastened down… the stormwinds" (383) is a 'Hyperborean' north wind that strikes not head on nor from the side, but *downwards*, that is from the upper skies. In striking from above rather from the side, such a wind would indeed be especially "flattening" and moreover an 'inspired', truly god-given wind emanating from the heavens.

The Cosmic Aspect of Scheria

The island comes into sight clearly enough, with its shadowy mountains and striking appearance "like a shield on the misty face of the water" (5, 279-281). The phrase invites comment, not least on account of Homer's use of the shield as a cosmic image in the description of the great shield of Achilleus in the earlier Epic (*Iliad* 18, 468-607). There are further resonances with the Minoan world, where the bull which provides the oxhide (from which shields take their many protective layers) is prominent in iconography and ritual, as is the shield itself. The exact values of the bull in that culture are inaccessible to us, but we have already had cause to observe several instances in the *Odyssey* where the oxhide

exercises a supernal function. For example, when he will be on Ithaka once again, Odysseus will pray for guidance on instigating the battle in the hall. The three favourable omens from the gods encouraging him to action may have been determined by an apparent 'incubation' ritual of sleeping on the oxhide (20, 95ff.). The skins of cattle slaughtered betimes on the island of Thrinakia could not, it seems, die, although the animals were dead and eaten (12, 393-396). In addition, the disgraceful conduct of the suitors who *sat* on the oxhide at the very doors of the *oikos* while playing trivial games (1, 106-109) makes all too clear their *lèse-majesté* in respect of the sacred oxhide. The implication of these episodes is that the bull, dead or alive, is an important player in the mechanics of the archaic cosmos. Is he perhaps the constellation Taurus, who lends his power to men during the Age which bears his name?

Not only do we have the sacred hide, the shield also evokes a complementarity between an *omphalos* as a central boss of a shield and the *omphalos* as navel of the cosmic body, as in the case of the island of Kalypso. Scheria falls into place as a northern island, not of the cardinal north, but in the uppermost heights in the northern hemisphere. Upon arrival, Odysseus will be driven ashore on a beach that lies due north from Kalypso's navel-island; the path of the *axis* will then have been completed, for a line will have been drawn between the two *termini*, which are both *omphaloi*, and passing through the due centre of the Earth. The 'navel of the sea' meets the 'navel of the sky'.

If we are sufficiently attuned to the metaphoric potential of Scheria as an island fortified by bull-power and located at a junction point (where *axis* power may flow from above, down through those mountainous heights to the central point of convergence or transition) then we will be ready to accept that Scheria is a very remarkable island indeed, and one cosmically defined moreover. And thus it proves. Not only is the hero to be reborn there, he will be granted a magical form of transport back to his homeland. The "oar-loving" Phaiakians' proud boast that they are close to the gods and enjoy powers beyond the human norm is eventually to be proved by the miraculous transportation of the hero back to his own land.

The Storm

But first Odysseus must survive the 'ocean of chaos' before finding a safe landing on Scheria. A great storm of mighty proportions such he has never yet encountered, far worse even than that which took the lives of his disobedient companions after the debacle on the island of Helios, is released by the raging of Poseidon. The force of the storm may signify the

traveller's transition into a higher order. A lesser storm, such as the event that drove the sailors on to the shores of the Lotus Eaters, would serve for exit from the Mediterranean Sea into the wider seas of the cosmos where the ecliptic circle defines Space and Time; a greater one, such as the storm which drowned all the hero's surviving companions, would indicate transition *away from* the ecliptic circle, and an even mightier one would interpret entry into the wider Empyrean. This, it is proposed, is the pattern underlying the violent weather events involving escalating storms at sea. Close perusal of three storms, at Cape Maleia, leaving the island of Helios, and between the islands of Ogygia and Scheria, will reveal that each is longer and more destructive of life and material than the last. The first causes trouble and delay, the second the destruction of the ship and the death of all the sailors other than Odysseus, and the last brings the lone surviving hero to a depth of despair indicative of the imminent destruction of the heroic Self – an event which may or may not 'open the way' to a new life.

The poet piles one upon another a sequence of 'centralising' similes and metaphors expressing both centrifugal and centripetal movement, respectively away from and towards the centre. While "Stormblasts of winds" strike "from every / direction" i.e. towards the craft (5, 304f.) and the hero trembles and awaits his destruction, these same contrary winds toss the raft on the waves like thistledown, which in autumn is thrown into "bunches which *hold fast* one on another" (5, 329). By contrast, his craft is later destroyed by a wind which decentralises him, casting his fractured ship in all directions like chaff blown *far and wide* from a dry pile (5, 368f.). Odysseus is either to be '*dis*-membered' (that is, destroyed in body and / or soul) by the conflicting forces, or psychically '*re*-membered' in fresh form by the forces that draw together his broken body and spirit. Like the shaman who experiences a fragmentation of the mind in the course of his induced trance and all the pain and confusion involved in rediscovering his original wholeness, the shipwrecked traveller has to be painfully unmade before he can be re-made.

Next, the pattern of centrifugal and centripetal forces driving away from the centre and then towards it, is re-enacted by the winds. East Wind which clashed against South Wind, then West against North (5, 295ff.) brought the hero to his knees in fear. Worse was yet to come. Tossed about, "*entha kai entha"*, "now here, now there" (330) as if battered by those winds of Tartarus (the Underworld) described by Hesiod,[7] the craft *spirals* (whirlpool or maelstrom, again) until the mast tree (the *axis*) comes crashing down and Odysseus is cast into the sea. The raft is now at the mercy of four winds which alternate in driving her hither and thither, but

this time the winds (following the centralising motif of the binding of the thistledown) meet headlong in confrontation: first the raft is crushed by South Wind meeting North, then East Wind and West burst in upon her (331f.). The net effect of East meeting West and North meeting South, 'co-inciding', is that a point of neutrality is created, a *stasis* like the standing still of the Sun at solstice, for the meeting of the winds is that very meeting of spatial directions by which the point of unity is determined. The narrative outcome is that Odysseus on his raft is now spinning *in the eye of a hurricane, which is esoterically a spiritual centre.*

The Uplifting Hurricane

'The eye of the storm' is experienced even in temperate latitudes, but even more so within the tropics where hurricanes or cyclones in formation permit a brief but equally terrifying moment of calm between destructive downblasts. A vertical column of whirling air such as cyclone or whirlwind would be visible from afar - an '*axis* in transit'. That such a force could be capable of carrying a man into the skies (which has been known) or even further to some Otherworld, is implicit in the desperate prayer Penelope will utter at the very moment when Odysseus is (quite unbeknown to her) praying to Zeus for omens favourable to his enterprise, the slaughter of the suitors: she begs to be snatched up by a stormwind that might carry her down "the misty pathways" to the point where Okeanos "empties his stream" (20, 61-67). Even the fate of the luckless daughters of Pandareos who, despite the favours of several goddesses, were carried away by "the seizing stormwinds" and given over to the Furies, does not deter the first lady of Ithaka. The involvement, in this episode, of a physical force of nature in the after-death fate of the individual, may be considered an allusion to the earlier transition between worlds of her husband Odysseus.

There is ample supporting documentary proof of an early belief in the moment of calm between stormwinds as a token of divine presence. Job heard the voice of God the Creator speak to him from the centre of the hurricane after his troubles had run their course (38, 1f.): "The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" Elijah, it is recalled, was also carried bodily up to Heaven in a whirlwind,[8] whilst Enoch was carried up "into a place of whirlwind on the mountain", and the top of that mountain reached up to Heaven.[9] The *Kalevala* relates in similar fashion how Ilmarinen, being sent by Vainamoinen to forge the Sampo (*axis*) was in like fashion carried up to a magical castle in a whirlwind.[10] The underlying

principle is the turning of the heavenly *axis* which, like Archimedes' screw, could create an upward spiralling drive so similar in effect to a spinning whirlwind; the internal vortex, in appearance an empty space, is also 'potentiality' or 'presence' or the open path from one world to another. By viewing the whirlwind as a variant *axis* it becomes clear how it can transport human creatures to the higher spiritual plane when the latter is conceived as a spatial location.

None would expect an easy ride on the back of a whirlwind, for after all, entry into the blessed land is the hard-won privilege of those righteous men who have proved their worthiness through many trials and temptations. Therefore during his approach to Scheria the hero suffers the pains of a very great labour. Although the extended rebirth imagery of the passage is evocative of physical labour in childbirth, the mystical sense of 'entry into an immaterial state' lies at a short allegorical remove. Odysseus' first sighting of Scheria occurs when the winds have died down and the waves lift him high in the water. There follows a developed simile of a father's recovery from sickness which is as "welcome" (three times) to his children as it is to the gods, and the agent of recovery is that very island which now appears to the exhausted swimmer (5, 394-399). The land of the Phaiakians, the simile implies, *is* 'Life itself' and the shipwrecked sailor is temporarily the recovering father drawn back from the frontier of death. But the reference to "his children" betrays the deeper allegory of spiritual rebirth into the new body.

Return to Life

It is Odysseus' spiritual recovery which is to be accomplished on Scheria, but for the moment the message is encoded in terms of physical entry into life, with the girdle of Ino (amniotic sac or umbilical cord?) cast back into the sea, and Odysseus' likening to an octopus which, like the skin-shedding snake, is rumoured to regenerate after losing a limb. Passage along the sweet-running river (birth canal?) delivers the new born to a safe place and finally, sweet sleep in a 'cradle' of trees, before his cleansing in the hands of Nausikaa's kindly nursemaids.[11]

His total nakedness at this point of the story deserves brief comment. A common and widespread motif in ancient mythology uses the divestment and re-clothing of the subject as a metaphor of the soul's incarnation: the 'putting-off' of the old body and the 'putting-on' of the new. Inanna, it will be recalled, left items of royal clothing and tokens of her mortal power at each of seven gates on her descent to Hell, and when the primal pair Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness they were first re-

clothed in "coats of skin" (*Genesis* 3, 5f.) then cast out from the Garden of Eden, specifically through the door guarded by the sword-wielding Cherubim. Their 'Fall' represents a putting-on of the mortal body, a departure from the paradisal form and return to earthly materiality. It is no coincidence either that alterations to clothing at the outset of a transformative journey take place at a doorway, for both clothing and doors are tokens of transitional liminality. A similar fate is suffered by Joseph, whose glorious "coat of many colours" was ripped from him by his envious brothers who then threw him into the pit ('of Hell', to be followed later by incarceration in Pharaoh's dungeons, below ground) and dipped the coat in the blood of a kid before they presented it, as proof of death, to their father Jacob.[12]

Waters of Life

This episode featuring the landing on Scheria has much to offer in terms of motifs of regeneration. Some pertinent detail indicates precisely where Odysseus has arrived in the cosmic scheme of things. As we have proposed, he is arriving at a conceptual Centre (the 'boss' of the 'shield' on the misty sea, 281) and he is still afloat in cosmic waters. His previous location had lain at Kalypso's *omphalos*, which corresponds to some part of the southern hemisphere. At this point the symbolism of fish and all fishy creatures and the potential of the archetypal equation 'water = life' can help to clarify archaic thinking.

Circe and Kalypso have given us some useful clues to direction which can be pursued even further. Circe is at home in her Tropic, with the Crab of Cancer, and Kalypso with the Goat-Fish of Capricorn. Under the feet of the horses which draw the chariot of Apollo at Delphi lie the two 'fish' symbols of dolphin and octopus, a reference to the course of the Sun in which the octopus has replaced the crab as symbol of the Tropic of Cancer and the dolphin stands as representative of the lower waters, of Capricorn. The intention must have been to define the tropical limits of the passage of Apollo's chariot. Both crab and octopus carry 'infernal' associations, as markers of the entrance to Hell:[13]

Cancer - crab or octopus - summer solstice = Gates of Hell
Capricorn - dolphin or goat fish - winter solstice = Gates of Heaven.

Since it is so closely associated with the course of the Sun, the 'sea' which provides the habitat for both these marine creatures can only be the cosmic ocean.

This information, taken in conjunction with the episode's directional markers, tells us that Odysseus has returned to a distant, northerly location, having in some sense replayed the visit to Hades which took him from Circe's halls to a more southerly point, then return. This time he has ascended from Kalypso's island to a region approximating to Circe's, i.e. from south to north across the middle plane. This is entirely in agreement with axial symbolism discussed earlier which permits Earth-born mortals to descend below the Earth, via the *omphalos* of the middle plane, but reserves the unbroken upward path for the gods or perhaps certain highly gifted individuals worthy of the name. It is essentially the doctrine of the Two Paths set out in the Cave of the Nymphs.

Remembering however the principle of centre and anti-centre, which had Hermes gathering a 'southern' plant as antidote to Circe's poisons, it is likely that the octopus signifies the *route not taken*. Odysseus does *not* meet the fate of the octopus - he emerges from the sea and is *not* confined to the rocks of adversity where the octopus clings for existence. This example illustrates the potential of symbols to encapsulate stark opposites, especially those concerning a change of state - are we dealing, for example, with a road not taken, a point of emergence, or with one's destination? The question may be answered with the realisation that the beginning of the road is still 'of the road'. As a 'liminal' amphibian (of the sea shore)[14] capable of surviving briefly on land as well as in the sea, the octopus is a fitting image of two modes of existence and the potential to move between them.

Across multiple cultures, the sea, whether terrestrial or cosmic, is the birthplace of all life forms.[15] Yet when Homer chose Okeanos as the "first of all",[16] he cannot have been thinking of salt water as a medium for creation. Rather, this unsettling priority again favours an interpretation of Okeanos as the cosmic ocean surrounding the Earth's sphere, like a globe containing a globe (or alternatively, a flat plane). From this outer space the sweet waters which nourish the Earth will spring forth and flow across the land. There are too many instances of life-giving divinities arising from this 'sea' for us to think otherwise. Kalypso has many sisterly counterparts as 'Women of the Sea'. Greek Aphrodite, born from the foam, is that 'Woman of the Sea' associated with the dolphin; and Ishtar is the Lady of the Lotus (born from the waters); while Chinese Kwan-yin often appears in her role as 'Goddess of the Depths of the Sea'. Nor do they lack male counterparts. Sumerian Ea is the 'Lord of the Deep' represented by the goat fish of Capricorn.

The octopus has fellow spirits in other animal symbolism, where various sea creatures of ambiguous nature offer similar passage into new

life. The Biblical Leviathan is well known as the fish which swallowed Jonah and cast him out again (into regeneration). This is the Leviathan beast which provided mediaeval Europe with a fishy monster whose jaws open wide to swallow the souls of the damned at the gates of Hell, so often depicted in scenes of the Last Judgment. In Indic tradition, 'the jaws of death' are represented by the ogre-head of the *makara* found on the arches or keystones of doorways.[17] Again, this is a symbol with double aspect. The demon of the *makara,* far from being a death's head, provides the *positive* death which revivifies in the spiritual sense. It is a crocodile head which lies open-jawed 'against the current' to seize the unwitting swimmer, who is the newly-deceased soul. From its underwater position the *makara* serves as an agent of destruction in respect of the physical matter which ties the soul to earthly existence. It is another 'open gate' and as such, it finds a place in the Hindu Zodiac as the sign of Capricorn. The water symbolism of many cultures elaborates upon the darkness of the 'world below' from which the path can only lead to the higher light. It occasionally figures as the 'Well at the World's End' which is a marker of Heaven's end, and the end of the year, and the furthest point of the soul journey. From the depths, there is no other way but upwards into the higher realm.[18] Just as the lotus rises from the waters and floats upon the surface, so must man's immortal soul follow the pre-ordained pathway from depth to height, out of darkness and into the light of knowledge.

The primordial waters are the domain of water gods who express the power of the element and its fickleness. Such a one is Poseidon, who is essentially Varuna / Ouranos and perhaps even Aiolos, lord of winds and seas. The *Yaksa* water spirits, of whom Coomaraswamy wrote at length (1993) belong to an ancient layer of Vedic religion. They represent not the physical body of water but its essence, as waters of regeneration, and they bear also an astronomical value as living inhabitants of cosmic, not earthly seas. Coomaraswamy[19] explained the relationship between *Yaksa* spirits and the *gandharvas,* who guard the gate to paradise where the elixir of immortality is to be had by those prepared and worthy of it. Krsannau is a *gandharva,* an archer, and he guards the Galactic Centre in a form akin to Sagittarius. But a *Yaksa* can also function as an embodiment of the nourishing principle, the elixir *Soma*, the source of life. In Greek tradition the *Yaksa*'s place is taken by Dionysos, but such transformative elements may equally be represented by the Golden Fleece, or the Golden Apples of the Hesperides guarded by a serpent, both of which were the object of a quest among remote islands equivalent to those visited on Odysseus' own cosmic journey.

Soma, explains Coomaraswamy, lies locked within a rock or mountain which is the 'wall of sky' accessible only through the Sundoor of which we have written. This accords with the magical plant of immortality which Gilgamesh seeks beyond the twin ('double-doored') mountains of Mashu, guarded by scorpion 'men' (actually one of each gender) and, lamenting, loses to the snake of the waters in the Land of Darkness. He has found the 'Tree of the Gods' in the garden beyond the darkness, a plant whose name is "Old Man Grown Young".[20] More familiar in Abrahamic religions is the plant or tree that grows in the Garden of Eden, source of waters and fruit, but home to the serpent, where sword-wielding gate guardians watch over the garden and the use or mis-use of its spiritual nourishment.

The Sagittarius centaur is also the defender of a garden, and in particular, a protector of the Tree of Life found rooted there (figure VII-13). John Major Jenkins[21] has reviewed Coomaraswamy's chapter on the *makara* and reached some interesting conclusions concerning the astronomical aspects of the Vedic symbolism, which the first writer did not expand upon at any length. The "waters" are confirmed by Jenkins as the cosmic ocean of the night sky. As a gate of passage into death and rebirth, the *makara* nullifies time and, by virtue of its position at the feet of Sagittarius the archer, is at home in the house of Capricorn, hence in the Milky Way and close to the Galactic Centre; moreover, a horse's head, or for the Maya, a monster mouth, often serves as a symbol of this dark cleft in the Way where the centre of the galaxy is located.[22] The Sagittarius figure featured in figure VII-12 as the guardian of the World Tree carries a scorpion tail which, for Jenkins, refers to the other cosmic gateway in Cancer / Gemini, the Anti-Galactic Centre; he expresses the centre and top of the cosmos. Any attack on the centre defended by the archer figure is an attempt to steal the elixir of life, the Vedic *Soma*, "nectar of paradise". Readers may care to follow Jenkins' arguments for the insight they offer into the role played by ambrosial liquids in ancient mythology; Homer's Epics receive no mention, but there are several parallels between the symbolism of *Soma* and similar potions in the hands of Polyphemos, Circe and Kalypso which deserve deeper investigation.

All these legends relate to the jealously-guarded lower waters which promise eternal life, but not alas, its inevitable acquisition. It remains to be seen whether Odysseus will be any more successful in his quest, if indeed immortality is the object of his journey.

The Phaiakian Palace

By a circuitous route we arrive at the conclusion that the island of Scheria which accommodates the garden and palace of Alkinoös represents a paradisal state. Odysseus seems to have passed through the cave of Kalypso at the Galactic Centre, and, thrown again into the turmoil of the cosmic ocean, found his way along path of the hurricane until he has passed out of the known cosmos. Can his route have led him 'upwards' to the circumpolar stars which lie outside the circle of the ecliptic, hence "beyond the passage of the Sun"?

The isolated and exceptional position of the island, "far away from men who eat bread" (6, 8) is part of the poet's description of Phaiakian resettlement after migration from Hypereia, and in fitting echo, Nausikaa will later underline their closeness to the immortals, their separateness, at home in a liminal territory:

> "…we live far apart by ourselves in the wash of the great sea
> at the utter end, nor do any other people mix with us". (6,204f.)

Scheria is far away, then, but still ill-defined and marked by social isolation. Yet one may choose to see a reference to the 'floating pole' of the north in this displacement from a former settlement on "the spacious land, Hypereia" (6, 4f.; surely a reference to the heavens above, or a specific point in the heavens?) to a new location equally distant but as obscure. Perhaps the reference is to a Pole Star homeland which as a result of Precession was displaced into new territory (still close to the gods, and still in the sky). This is speculative thinking, as yet without textual support, but of one thing we may be sure, namely that 'benevolent' Scheria forms a counterbalance to 'inimical' Hades. Wherever Hades is to be found, we presume Scheria must lie at the opposite spatial point. Therefore Odysseus' journey to Heaven (or the Isles of the Blessed, or Elysium, as may be) must lead upwards towards the light. And we know from descriptions of the ideal land exemplified by Olympos, the home of the gods, that in such a paradise the air is "shining bright"… "and the white light glances upon it" (6, 44f.).

The Home of the Bear

Just as the glittering house of Menelaos was compared by Telemachus with the court of Zeus on Olympos (4, 72-75), the equally brilliant palace of Alkinoös is brought into focus as a divine palace by the departure of

Athene from the bed chamber of Nausikaa for the slopes of "unmoving" Olympos (6, 41f., though only to return very soon after in disguise, to guide Odysseus to Alkinoös and Arete, 7, 19-21). The goddess has just put into the mind of the young Nausikaa to beg her father for mules and a wagon to take the washing to the shore. The wagon strongly evokes 'Charles' Wain' or wagon, the best known of northern constellations, also called the Big Dipper or Great Bear. So perhaps after all Odysseus has reached the circumpolar stars lying at the top of the World Pillar, where in some languages is fixed the 'nail' of the sky, and where many traditional communities consider there to be a point of entry (a 'hole') where the soul-traveller may pass through the fabric of the sky-tent. It is a measure of the antiquity and universality of the nomenclature of the Bear or Wagon that this constellation is the only one named in these two terms in every known language. Commonly it becomes the conveyance of a king (Charles' Wain in France, for Charlemagne, and Arthur's Wain in Cornwall for the British King). The reputed seven stars which make up its outline are credited with instigating the enormous importance of the number seven, not only in identifying critical constellations but in classifying 'Wonders of the World' and literary or philosophical groups, as well as other septenary systems in myth and ritual. The northern land of the Hyperboreans which has been identified here in chapter 3 with the area of the North Pole Star is not the only instance in which the circumpolar region takes on the aspect of a northern paradise, for India, too, has stories about a golden land full of wonderful orchards just like Alkinoös' garden of plenty. According to the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata,*[23] it is home to happy people living very long lives, just like their Hyperborean neighbours. The name of this land is Uttara Kuru, the 'Uttermost Land', to which we may compare "at the utter end", or "at the edges of the world" in Homeric discourse. It is also the home of heroes and holy men who have attained immortality. For the Indic philosopher, Uttara Kuru is to be found on the north slope of the polar mountain Mount Meru which lies under the North Pole Star. As described in Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion*, the distant land of Uttara Kuru is said to be full of gold, jewels, flowers and fruits, and of the fruiting trees it is recorded that "the trees always bear flowers and fruits, they swarm with birds, they are of a heavenly smell and touch, and yield all desires". So they are no ordinary trees, but reveal growth of a semi-magical order. The most interesting detail as far as this inquiry is concerned is the implied simultaneous flowering and fruiting, when the last should properly follow the first. The same condensation of time ('timelessness') is found in this Indian northern paradise as we shall find on the island of the Phaiakians. Piety, love, song, music, all "mixed with gay laughter" may sound like a

résumé of Phaiakian social life but are in fact also named among the happy qualities ascribed to the land of the North Kurus. Such conditions may equally be traced to the Field of Reeds in Egyptian eschatology, and even to the Chinese myth of the 'Five Isles' which lie in the depths of a vast, bottomless ocean. These last islands are identified quite unequivocally in Chinese tradition with a point where eight rivers from all eight compass directions flow into an abyss where they give rise to the Milky Way. In other words, the islands lie at an omphalic centre where the horizontal dimensions of space encounter the axial and vertical, in the form of the Way.[24] And where there is a still point in space, there must follow a stilling of time.

When Odysseus at last finds his way to the palace of his hosts, he marvels at the silver, bronze and cobalt of doors, walls and pillars. A simile brackets "the glory on the high roofed house" with the glorious light of Sun and Moon (7, 84f.) There are further wonders in the shape of an entrance hall lined by elaborate, costly thrones and guarded by ageless, immortal dogs made of gold and silver. Human figures, again cast in immutable gold, hold flaring torches to illuminate the inner room where the elders feast (84-102). The contrast between the brilliant luxury of Scheria and the discomforts and lack of nourishment in gloomy Hades could not be greater. All is bright and timeless in the home of the Phaiakian princes, and richly, mysteriously magical, far beyond the experience of mortals such as Odysseus.

The Nature of Sleep

So let us take a closer look at dream-like Scheria. Is it perhaps another Land of Sleep? Odysseus slept as his companions foolishly opened the bag of winds in the west, and again, whilst the same fellows slaughtered the cattle of the Sun in the east. He sleeps a profound, revivifying sleep on the Scherian island between two trees of similar nature, both olives, one wild, one cultivated, while sheltered from wind, rain and Sun (5, 465-485). Freedom from extremes of weather we know as a characteristic of the gods' Olympos, so here is an early hint of the paradisal nature of the island. Not only a cradle in the sense of a basket woven from "interlacing" branches and filled with a warm 'blanket' of dry leaves, this 'cradle of rebirth' makes of the hero a "seed of fire" ("*sperma pyros*", 490) in the extended simile comparing Odysseus with a burning log buried in an ash heap. Fire is the comfort of man, but also the principle of life itself, or why else should the mortal baby Dionysos have been held in the flames by his

divine nursemaid Demeter?[25] It may well be that Odysseus is to be offered the same boon of immortality.

If Scheria is to reveal her secrets, she must be measured against the criteria given for Olympos or other homes of the gods and favoured mortals, such as Elysium. The principal criteria are summarised briefly below. They define Heaven or paradise as it is found in Homeric and other contemporary sources:

> Scheria is an abode "firm and unmoving" (6, 42); in contrast to the floating island of Aiolos, which lies on the ecliptic (10, 3). It is therefore in a polar or circumpolar position.
>
> It is high, at the zenith, or 'north', at the upper limit of the hero journey.
>
> Book 4 (561-568) describes the gentle climate of Elysium at "the limits of the Earth", where the weather is never extreme (6, 42-45).
>
> Death, infirmity and disease are unknown, or come late. In the Sumerian paradise myth, *Enki and Ninhursag*: "The old woman says not 'I am old woman".[26]
>
> There are no seasons: fruits, plants and trees flourish continuously in a pattern of unfailing fertility. A flowering meadow often characterises connection to the source of all fertility.
>
> Phaiakian activities are those in which gods and muses delight: music, dance, athletic competition, feasting. These are also among Hyperborean pastimes, according to Pindar.[27]

Of the various Olympian attributes, the unreal level of fertility and the longevity of its inhabitants are the most striking in their implications for the arrest or distortion of time. We have long delayed treatment of this theme in favour of the three spatial directions, but finally here on Scheria there occurs the most perfect exemplar of the fourth dimension, Time, or more precisely 'frozen time': in the beautiful garden of Alkinoös and even in the halls of its king.

Time and Shadow

How can an early society express in literary or iconographic form such an abstract concept as Time? Largely by metaphor, and by reference to the Sun, for this is our chronometric measure of direction. Just as a shadow interprets the position of the Sun, movement of that same shadow projected, say, from a fixed object, interprets the passage of time; and the lack of shadow must interpret time at a standstill, or a country without, or beyond, time. Such a country would be beyond the Sun-as-time, hence not of this world. Earlier we described how, when the Arkadians set out to recreate a facsimile of Olympos on their sacred double-peaked mountain Lykaion, they built a great temple to Zeus where the god's altar faced east between two columns. Pausanias provides the earliest surviving record of this Lykaian temple, which he names as a place curiously without shadow.[28] In Vedic literature, the lack of shadow has been interpreted as a token of divinity and deathlessness, whether the subject of shadow be a tree or a mountain.[29] It is the same in folklore where the 'Man without a Shadow' is not entirely of this world. So, when Pausanias draws comparison between Mt. Lykaion and Ethiopian Syene (Aswan) the basis of similarity is the lack of shadow at Syene when the Sun stands in Cancer, he tells us. This is perfectly credible, for at noon on this latitude of Aswan (close to the Equator) and at summer solstice, the noonday Sun would be at the zenith and highest point of the annual cycle, hence casting little or no shadow. The same cannot truly be said of Mt. Lykaion further to the north, so the intention must be esoteric. As recorded by implication in Pausanias' given passage, the Greek temple builders (or their myth-makers) intended an Otherwordly location where unexplained, mythical shadowlessness was a permanent feature. The mystical sense of such a phenomenon has been interpreted by Kerényi who believes that Mt. Lykaion is a place without time, a place above life or death.[30] His reading implicitly links *height* with an absence of *space, direction or time.* Correct too must be the assumption that humans pass the sacred threshold *on pain of death* because the precinct identifies a liminal point between life (as light, "*lyke"*) and death (as darkness, "*lykos",* the wolf being a creature of the night); so unauthorised entry into the temple approximates to passage out of this life into the timeless Otherworld without the sanction of the gods. Further instances of the reputed phenomenon can be culled from other cultures.

One legend related how Alexander the Great plucked "the shadowless lance" out of the highest peak of the Taurus Mountains as proof of his kingship.[31] The tale not only confirms the ancient link between the *axis*

mundi and the firmament, via the mountain top, but also indicates how in popular imagination the power of great rulers was in some manner a function of the *axis*. King Arthur's boyhood exploit in drawing the sword from the stone (an indicator of future greatness) is another case in point in which a similar 'weapon' stands duty for the *axis,* whilst the stone does similar duty as a containing *omphalos*-mountain. Such tales offered in legitimisation of kingship do so on the basis of highly privileged access to cosmic power.

When, however, the theme of the shadowless lance is discovered in the context of founding myths of indigenous peoples, that same 'access to power' may imply the well-being of a present and future race. In relating how their homeland was chosen, the Desana people of the northwest Amazon on the Equator describe a supernatural hero who travelled until his upright staff would cast no shadow. He would, in theory, have been on the Equator at the equinoxes, but this is mythic, not practical geography. Another quite different possibility suggested by modern anthropological analysis of the Desana tradition has interpreted the staff of this founding ancestor as a shamanic image, where the upright equates to a fertilising ray of sunlight; accordingly the ancestor's initial search would have been for the conceptual World Centre.[32]

This ancient and admittedly remote tradition gives further pause for thought as far as the star-topped, god-given ash spear of Achilles cut from high on Mount Pelion[33] is concerned, and perhaps too the planted oar of Odysseus (11, 129), a *sema* or sign described by Teiresias (at the pivot-point of the Nekyia) in the course of his prophecy of the death of Odysseus in "sleek old age" (i.e. the longevity motif, 136) and the happy prosperity of the hero's people (the fertility motif). These and the other scaled-down variants such as wands and sceptres all serve in the epics as tokens of the power and potential beneficence of the *axis* substitute. Whenever time was measured by solar referents, the lack of those referents ('shadowlessness') could only indicate 'beyond time' or 'out of time'. It may be divined that the *axis* in these examples is being imagined as a form of celestial *gnomon* which instead of casting a shadow across the ground or sundial, is recording either the extreme height and centrality of the Sun, or its absence. There is only one area other than the Equator where our Sun cannot, in un-informed imagination, cast its rays as shadows, and that is far beyond its orbit, in the darkness of the cosmic sea where the ancient star watchers imagined Heaven to lie. Unlike those occasions when variations in cosmic phenomena are viewed as ill omens (especially during eclipses of Sun or Moon) this lack of shadow seems to confer a positive value, in sanctifying a temple, for instance, or legitimising kingship. It

must be intended that the invisible *axis* or *gnomon* should connect a temple or a king to a higher power deriving from a universal, supra-cosmic source lying outside the solar system but still giving temporal and spatial definition to the known world. At the same time, a 'shadowless' sacred place, such as the temple on Mt. Lykaion, may be, in ideal terms at least, perceived to lie at the World Centre as defined by equinoctial time on the equatorial plane. This may then be spoken of as a time and place of total balance, when ecliptic and equator are unified through alignment.

Heavens 'Beyond Time'

'Time-*lessness*' is a familiar theme in universal folklore, where 'the Land that Time Forgot' is a magical alternative country. It is often said that mortals drawn there by faerie maidens or their like will find nothing changed upon returning to their own homeland. These reflections, and the testimony of Olympos' own timelessness in respect of crops unfailing, weather unchanging and death delayed or non-existent, lead one to believe that Olympos too is without time. It will be remembered that the gates of the sky and Olympos are guarded by the Hours (*Iliad* 5, 748-751) for whom we may read Time or the Seasons, or those stars and planets that mark the passage of time. These gates open the way to Hera on her chariot and allow her to pass into "the dense darkness" which lies on the other side, beyond the shining realm of the gods. The horses bear the goddess' chariot through the space which lies between the starry Heaven and the Earth itself: "as far as man can see with / his eyes" (767-772). The gods dwell not on any earthly mountain but high in the skies, among or beyond the stars, where Olympos appears to mark the furthest border of a particular zone, although unfortunately the text is not specific enough for us to determine whether that border lies on the ecliptic, perhaps in conjunction with significant stars, or beyond it. It can however be inferred that Olympos and perhaps the similarly timeless island of Alkinoös are located somewhere in the faraway Empyrean.

Sanskrit literature describes the heavens as multi-layered. Each layer is named a *loka*, or place. The first, *bhuloka*, defines the lower area which (seen from Earth) can be lit by the Sun or Moon. The next higher, the *bhuvarloka*, is the space from the *bhuloka* to the solar circle; holy sages live there. Lastly, Heaven occupies the great space beyond, in which the planets of the solar system circle endlessly and the circumpolar stars cluster around the central Pole Star: this is the *svarloka*. Each and every *loka* will be destroyed at the end of the Great Age. These three planes or layers correspond in the broadest terms not only to the spiritual progress of

man, but also to the regions identified on a previous page as the locations of successive storms and the accompanying 'elevation' of the heroic traveller: from Earth, to ecliptic, to sky. It is therefore most likely that, in Indic terms, Odysseus has at last arrived at the highest (physical and spiritual) point of his initiatory journey when he gains the island of Scheria.

So we return to the land of the Phaiakians, where the orchard of Alkinoös displays the divine fertility of a country outside time, where fruit never gives out, nor spoils, and the abundant vineyards bear ripe and unripe fruit and harvesting proceeds apace *simultaneously* with the drying and processing of the grapes. Fertility is extreme and unvarying. Time is cancelled in this place where green plants "are lush through the seasons" (7,128) as if immune to climate and change. It is hard for terrestrials such as we to imagine life without time, for timelessness imposes a suspension of action, speech, and movement, and even thought, all being dependent upon sequence, whether it is one foot or one word which must follow upon another. It is especially difficult to indicate an 'absence of time' in the context of human interaction, since we do not share the immobility of the plants and fruits in the orchard of Alkinoös or the garden of Olympos, and the poet is occupied in crafting a story as well as composing and concealing a message.

How *does* Homer deal with Time and Death as abstractions? The heroes of the *Iliad* 'fall into death' like so many leaves from a tree: "As is the generation of leaves, so is that of humanity" (*Iliad* 6, 146). It is known from common experience that if the timber of the tree is alive, its leaf burgeons again in the spring. The Homeric view of time appears to be equally cyclic, proposing a world in which man, like the plants, has his seasons involving death and rebirth. When the lord Zeus has to punish his wayward immortals, it is suspension from above that is threatened, a 'fall', with the consequent descent from immortality into the realm of time which creates mortality. After all, Helios' threat to take his light down to Hades unless Odysseus and his men are punished for eating his cattle means that he would take solar time with him.

Perhaps problems of temporal sequence are the reason that most gods and goddesses never speak directly to man and never set foot on Earth. Time if it exists at all would seem to follow a different order on the mountain of the gods.

After his safe landing on Scheria (and later, on Ithaka too) Odysseus sleeps peacefully, a deep and gentle sleep of the sweetest kind, "most like / death" (13, 80f.) Now, sleep suspends action, and so does death, his brother.[34] The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, like Methuselah, slept away earthly time and emerged from their caves aged in body but incredibly still

alive after many years without food or drink. They had lived time in another dimension. It appears that 'sleep' for Homer, too, may have served as a metaphor or code word for transition between worlds, as in the voyage from Scheria to Ithaka when the hero sleeps so refreshingly. So deeply does he slumber and so smoothly does the ship run, that he enters a state of forgetfulness or oblivion in which all memories of past suffering are set aside (89-92). Odysseus' other sleeping times (which did not then correspond with the sleep of his companions) occurred at Aiolia (west) and Thrinakia (east), in other words, at the equinoctial times when the rising and setting Suns coincided with the Equator. It appears that the disasters arising from Odysseus' physical and spiritual 'absence' in sleep (the disaster with the bag of winds, for example, and the devouring of sacred cattle) function in two ways: they underline the importance of 'knowing and remembering, maintaining awareness', at the same time as they illustrate those stages in a soul journey offering opportunities for escape from the ecliptic circle which is also the Circle of Time. So far, Odysseus has slept through these opportunities, of which his companions were ignorant and consequently foolish in their conduct, but finally the supreme moment of 'escape from time' will present itself when the traveller approaches his home island of Ithaka. It is not surprising that this, his third and final sleep, will be the most profound and beneficial, for if the purpose of his journey is initiatory then his survival must confirm the success of the rites of passage.

Time and Silence on Scheria

Cyclic time as we know it appears to have been suspended at the moment when Odysseus approached the queen, Arete, still draped in the magical concealing mist that Athene has cast about him (7, 140). Despite Nausikaa's assurance that the queen will receive him well and that he should fall and embrace her knees, all the assembly fall silent as he does as advised, and the mist dissolves away from him (142ff.). "All fell silent through the house". The silence is maintained even after Odysseus has made his perfectly courteous and complimentary speech to Arete, begging for transport to his own homeland. Is this merely the shock of surprise? But the poet prolongs the moment still further, and repeats the detail, as is his custom. While Odysseus sits in the ashes of the hearth the whole company remains "stricken to silence" (154). It requires a tactful nudge from the old courtier Echenos to remind Alkinoös of his duties to a stranger (155-166) but the queen of whom so much has been promised, the gracious lady of high intelligence who is revered as a god by her people,

says nothing until later that evening when most guests have departed. This we know as 'the silence of Arete' which has been the subject of much debate among Homerists.

Concerning Arete, we note with some interest that the soul of the deceased in Orphic tradition was required to greet the guardian deities of the Otherworld as if they were rulers of the kingdom. These guardians were sometimes female, Persephone being a favourite choice as a 'Queen of the Dead' with the power to decide the fate of the soul. The soul must come to the guardian and perform an act of supplication, which was conceivably the kneeling embrace of the ruler's lower limbs. This is exactly what Odysseus does once he is admitted to the presence of Arete and Alkinoös in the seventh book, when as a suppliant, he "clasped Arete's knees with his arms" and the magical mist falls away from him (142f.). Yet not a word is spoken.

Ritual Silence

Specific values were attached to silence in this ancient world. The theme resonates through the two Epics of Homer and should not be divorced from contemporary practices of prayer, gesture and sacrifice as far as we are able to reconstruct them. The subject was taken up by René Guénon and his colleague Ananda Coomaraswamy in the 1930's, the latter treating the topic under the title of a 'Vedic Doctrine of "Silence."'[35] It is made clear in this article that the Vedic act of ritual sacrifice to the godhead, in which the worshipper identifies himself with the sacrifice and with the divinity, could be conducted in speech *or* in silence, whichever was most appropriate to the act in question. In speech, the sacrificer employs his phenomenal form and his personal skills; but in silence, he integrates his form to that of the unbounded, the undefined, in short, he becomes as one with the Infinite. A quotation from the *Taittiriya Samhita* clarifies the difference between silent and vocal acts of libation, even when one follows closely upon the other: "thus one bestows upon the deities the glory that is theirs, and upon men the glory that is theirs, and becomes divinely glorious among the deities and humanly glorious among men".[36] Silence, it appears, is of the gods and their holy places, and sound is properly an attribute of men. By means of silent prayer, known in the *Vedas* as "mental chant", the individual intelligence encompasses and transcends both this world and the Other.[37] Brahman *is* silence, and cannot be explained in words; and the Buddha, too, refuses to explain *nirvana*, for "the supreme state is one that transcends the distinction of utterance from silence".[38]

Penelope was silent during the long recognition scene when the beggar's true identity as the absent king was unfolding, and in this perhaps she is intended as a doublet of the silent queen Arete. Odysseus entered the ship of the Phaiakians silently (13, 76), as if he knew himself in the presence of a sacred object. Most significantly, the sceptre-bearing king placed at the heart (that is, the 'Centre') of a ring composition[39] describing the "precinct of the king", at the centre of the Shield of Achilleus (*Iliad* 18, 554-557) is described as watching his harvesters *in silence*. It would be easy to pass over this last small detail if it were not for the highly wrought nature of this magnificent set-piece. The king, the tree and the bull stand centrally, hence on the boss, in Greek the *omphalos* of the shield. Elsewhere in the course of his description of the *aristeia* (arming scene) of Agamemnon, the poet elaborates on the splendour of the boss on the king's shield, which is of dark cobalt, and lies in *the very centre* (*Iliad* 11, 35). Where else should it be? There must be a concealed message here. We have already noted the tree's potential value as an *axis mundi*, and the importance of the bull as an astronomical symbol with strong connections to power and fertility. These features, in the context of kingship (and most likely *divine* kingship),[40] beg the question, why should silence have also entered into the equation?

There is possibly a ritual meaning to silence even here, in the context of early Greek practice possibly inherited from pan-Indo-European tradition. It was earlier mentioned that in epic the gods do not normally communicate through mortal speech except via their intermediaries, such as Athene and Hermes. Zeus 'speaks' only in signs and portents to his favoured hero (20, 100-121). The habitual muteness of the gods is also implicit in the formulaic lines applied to Circe and Kalypso, who are, exceptionally, "dread goddesses endowed with speech"; for if it were not exceptional for such divinities to speak to men, why else should the goddesses' speech be so clearly and repetitively remarked upon? It would seem that silence is to be expected in the presence of the greater gods, and expected too that divine converse with lesser beings could not be conducted from the distant and timeless home of those immortals, who are by definition outside time and incapable of sequenced speech at human level.[41] Circe and Kalypso are the exceptional intermediaries between men and gods for whom articulate speech is a necessary part of their function.

The Return Flight

There lies a reminder of the separateness of the immortal time scale in the rapid return of Odysseus from the land of the Phaiakians. In contrast to

the prolonged stays with Circe and Kalypso and the violent thunderstorms which marked the hero's transition between worlds and towards *terra incognita*, the final stage of the journey is effortlessly achieved while Odysseus sleeps "a sleep most like / death" (13, 80f.). Like the Sun, a simile indicates, the Phaiakian ship is drawn by four horses, and the light beat of their feet lifts the ship above "the thunderous crash of the sea" (81-85). A further metaphor likens the ship to the flight of the falcon (85-88). Not only is the journey displaced from common time, it is removed from the normal laws of physics which determinate life on the surface of the planet, in particular the law of gravity that keeps the ships of men on the mundane ocean. The Phaiakian ship 'flies' the cosmic sea like a falcon or those nimble horses whose feet never seem to touch the ground.

Homer is employing a widespread folkloric motif which determines that the outward journey shall be long and the return brief. It is to be found in *Gilgamesh*, in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, in the *Myth of Er* and even in the legends of native Americans.[42] The reason may lie in ancient rites of passage or shamanic ritual, where the first journey (prepared for at length with music, dance, chanting and intoxicants) is necessarily prolonged, but the distant goal once achieved, the change of status is immediate and return much simplified. In any or either case, the underlying concept is personal transformation through knowledge and experience. The shamanic traveller once 'empowered' by his experiences travels as effortlessly as do the gods.

The theme of 'time suspended' reappears, not this time in code, but *en clair,* at the climactic moment of Penelope's final recognition of her husband. They weep together, at which point Homer introduces the magnificent extended simile in which Penelope, not Odysseus, is the shipwrecked swimmer who finally sights land through the violence of the storm, "so welcome was her husband to her as she looked upon him" (23, 239). In this poetic blurring of experience and a juggling of the time sequence, the mutuality of their sufferings is resolved, and the homecoming is complete. Now Athene brings about a great miracle which flies in the face of nature: she *suspends* time:

> "She held the long night back at the outward edge, she detained
> dawn of the golden throne by the ocean, and would not let her
> harness her fast-footed horses who bring the daylight to people…"
> (23, 242-246)

While time stands still in this manner, Odysseus relates the style of his return and they enjoy their lovemaking. Once Penelope has described her trials with the suitors, her husband summarises his many adventures in a

reduced version of his performance in the court of Alkinoös and finally they sleep. Only when she judges them well rested does Athene stir up the Dawn from her Ocean bed (344-349) and Odysseus, too, rises as if at one with the Sun, and goes forth to see his father on his estates among the many orchards (359). The poet has given his audience more than one hint that Ithaka is in some mysterious respect the double of Scheria. In so doing, both are characterised as lands permanently or occasionally outside Time.

Time and Self

In the context of the cosmic evolution of the soul, speech is to be understood as one of the sense perceptions that must be shed if the soul is to become purely itself, or perhaps, part of the greater world soul of later Platonic tradition. A philosophy which stipulates an 'abandonment of Self' as a necessary prerequisite to the elevation of the individual soul is as old as the *Vedas*,[43] where the qualifications for entry into the world beyond the Sun are dual: likeness, and anonymity. The aspirant must set aside his own identity and assume that of the divinity. Merit or worth, their absence or their presence, are all irrelevant. On the arrival of the soul at the Sundoor, the guardian asks, "Who art thou?" then advises, "This self of thine that hath been in me, be that now thine".[44] To answer the question by naming oneself in one's mortal identity leads to a falling back, 'captured by the Seasons', alias Time itself.

In the court of Arete and Alkinoös, Odysseus (who in an earlier adventure was 'Mr. No-Name') delays his statement of identity until after the narration of his Adventures. There is an interesting parallel between Odysseus' self-naming and an Orphic practice testified in the Gold Tablets. The initiate is frequently promised immortality and a special connection with the gods on the strength of their ritual purity (such as the execution of specific initiatory rites, in the B Tablets) or their own claimed divine lineage (in the A tablets).[45] In one of the best known of the tablets, from Crete, the claim of the deceased is entered as "I am the son (or child) of Earth and Starry Heaven". This has the appearance of a claim for immortality based on the identity of soul with the cosmic gods, with whom the aspirant aligns himself as a similarly cosmic being.

Also commonly recorded on the tablets is the importance of Memory. Salvation is determined by knowing and remembering to drink from the correct lake or fountain, which is not necessarily the first to be encountered by the voyaging soul. The latter must take care to watch for the Lake of Mnemosyne and at all costs to avoid the Lake of Lethe

(forgetfulness). Here we remember the times of trial for the companions and their captain on Aiolia and Thrinakia, where the men 'failed to remember' and the avoidance (or not) of the food of forgetfulness, the Lotus flowers or seeds in the land of the Lotus Eaters. The substance of that remembering is perhaps the rule of the Orphic sect in one case, or for Odysseus, the remembrance of Penelope and his homeland, the goal of his *nostos*, his return. But perhaps they are one and the same? Ithaka may finally prove identical to the paradise land sought by the Orphic adventurer.

Does Odysseus finally measure up to these ideals of remembering his goal and perhaps forgetting his higher 'Self'? Unfortunately, it would seem he falls into a typical act of *hubris*, with an exultant presentation of his origins which has more in common with a battle cry than an act of 'Self'-less submission. "My fame goes up to the Heavens", he declares, and he falls into a nostalgic longing for the sweet home of youth and his family, to which not even a fertile place (especially in an alien country) can bear comparison (9, 19-36). In so doing, he reveals that he is emotionally rooted in the phenomenal world of sense and experience. Emotional bonds and his own pride in this homeland (which by implication, is superior to the island of his hosts, which he is anxious to leave) reveal just how un-ready is the man for translation to a higher plane.

Immortality or Return?

Evidently, Scheria is not his final destination. It has mediated fittingly between the chaotic conditions of the circular and axial journeys and the true object of Odysseus' travels, the place of his heart. Ithaka and the resolution of the conflict there are ever foremost in his mind, and his hosts are most courteous in their farewell attentions. But there is no implied sense of failure, nor any intimation of judgment, as in the case of Gilgamesh's inattentiveness that allowed the snake to steal the plant of immortality. Immortality, as the episode with Kalypso revealed, is not a priority for this traveller. His journey can be viewed as exemplary or didactic, in that it traces a solar and stellar path for the possible education of those who need to be able to imagine the course of the Afterlife Journey; or possibly Odysseus is one of those evolving but imperfect souls who 'fall back' into existence, perhaps incarnated in a new bodily form, though finally recognised as himself.

As it is among the Phaiakians that Odysseus encounters a world typified by holy silence and utmost respect for the deities, it must be concluded that the hero has gained there a final staging post in his

transformative journey. Is it possible that he is now in some respect 'a god among gods'? Opinions may vary, for we have no way of establishing whether Homer intended his principal character to return to Ithaka as a divinity, a semi-divine or a heroic mortal, and perhaps his audience had no need to ask such a question. Odysseus has traced the path and returned, wiser and stronger no doubt, but still recognisably the father and husband loved by the gods and the renowned Achaian hero of Troy. He is an exemplar of wiliness, fortitude and integrity.

In several important ways the Odyssean journey differs from the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* with which it is so often (and rightly) compared. The intended destination of Gilgamesh was the land where immortality could be obtained from its guardian being, Utnapishtim. Odysseus on the other hand set his heart upon return to the land of his birth and family and no other intention is overtly declared by the poet. Therefore by setting the conclusion of Odysseus' *Apologoi* against the denouement of Gilgamesh's attempt to capture the elixir of life, and defining similarities and divergences, we may be able to discover some indications of Odysseus' spiritual condition at the conclusion of his fantasy voyage.

Gilgamesh and Odysseus

Here, our major concern is whether the hero has succeeded in gaining eternal life. Like Odysseus, Gilgamesh reached a palatial kingdom (in his case, the land of Utnapishtim) and was received with great hospitality by the 'king' and his wife, who like the Phaiakians, dwell like gods, far away where rivers flow forth.[46] Unfortunately Gilgamesh failed the trial of strength imposed on him (to stay awake for seven days) by *sleeping* for the whole week. At the end of this period he is dirty, his body matted. So he has failed to conquer time and by his 'sleeping' he has also failed to 'remember'. His sleep was profound and physical; he remains in the prison of sense phenomena, a characteristic of the unenlightened mortal being. The decay of his clothing and the staining of his body indicate in symbolic terms both the passage of time and the imperfection of his being. At this stage Gilgamesh would seem far from ready to receive the plant of immortality which Utnapishtim has in his gift to bestow.

Yet his kindly hosts wash and re-clothe Gilgamesh just as Nausikaa washed and re-clothed Odysseus, and the old clothing is cast into the sea, just like the veil of Ino. The bathing and re-clothing of the shipwrecked mariner were repeated in the Scherian palace itself at the behest of Alkinoös (8, 423-457). There is a significant difference, however. The

royal robes of Gilgamesh which replace the former rags will show no stain for the length of his stay with Utnapishtim. They will be without mark, "fresh and new".[47] Time, betokened by 'change and decay', has surely been suspended in his favour. True enough, it seems Gilgamesh is being prepared for immortality. With the help of Utnapishtim he is advised to make his way to the bottom of the sea (here we remember Kalypso) where he will find the plant of immortality, the "Plant of the Heartbeat"; with which "a man can regain his vigour".[48] Alas for Gilgamesh, all would have been well, if the hero had not paused to bathe in a refreshing pool. A snake creeps up "silently" and steals the plant, instantly shedding its skin[49] - as proof of the magical properties of the flower, one may suppose, and a token (if one were needed) of the renewal of life which would be echoed elsewhere in the octopus simile of Odysseus' emergence from the cosmic waters.

The fatal mistake of Gilgamesh was his inattentiveness, a kind of 'forgetting' which had disastrous consequences. In the last analysis he was not to gain the gift of eternal life. Despite the overlooking of his faults by Utnapishtim and his wife and the baptismal ritual which purged the supplicant of his faults, it is ultimately by his own negligence that all was lost. The prize lay in his own hand; all that was required of him was vigilance, which is another form of integrity consistent with knowledge, intelligence, or *nous*. Gilgamesh forgot to remember. Despite all his tuition and guidance Gilgamesh had fallen into human error typified by sleep and forgetfulness.

Has Odysseus fared any better? He too endured a vast and perilous journey and was led to an Isle of the Blessed with the help of a sea maiden, Kalypso who so closely resembles Siduri. He found himself among god-like people well-disposed to receive him into their company, even to the extent of encouraging him to marry their daughter Nausikaa. Had he accepted Nausikaa in marriage (she being all too eager to accept the handsome stranger, and her parents appreciative of his talents) his place among these happy people would have been assured and he would even have shared the fruits of their orchard of immortality. He would have made an ideal husband, knowing as he does the value of that exceptional like-mindedness ("*homophrosyne"*) which conveys through the metaphor of marriage the union of male and female principles, by which both human life is sustained and cosmic order preserved.

But Odysseus already has a wife, and as his oft-reiterated longing for return to her side has demonstrated he has already formed the ideal partnership. His own island is *his* perfect land; not perhaps as rich or perfect as Scheria but it is the country of his heart and the country that he

has most unfailingly remembered throughout his trials. He had been offered the equivalent of Gilgamesh's plant of immortality not once, but twice: yet he refused both Kalypso and Nausikaa in favour of Penelope who has never been far from his thoughts and his kingdom is still far dearer to him than the golden land of the Phaiakians. Unlike Kalypso, neither Nausikaa nor her parents express any disappointment that Odysseus does not accept their offers. Quite the opposite, for he departs with their blessings and many rich gifts.

Odysseus has remembered, not forgotten, and his choice is not to stay in some land of immortality or ease but to return to the less generous country of Ithaka where hard toil is the common lot of men. His return is, in comparison with the return (through failure) of the hero Gilgamesh, a positive act and, as we shall see, may prove a finer choice.

The Fate of the Phaiakians and the Myth of Destruction

His hosts courteously provide the gifts and transport which their guest had requested of them and Odysseus is magically born aloft on the celestial chariot drawn by supernatural horses. All this, despite Alkinoös' pre-knowledge from his father Nausithoös that some day in aiding a guest, retribution would fall upon them from the god Poseidon, their ship "stunned" and their city buried under a mountain (8, 564-569). This indeed is the fate planned by Poseidon for the returning ship, with the city buried for good measure, as per prophecy (13, 149-164). On the advice of Zeus an alternative plan was concocted which allowed the city to escape the god's anger, but the ship was to be turned into a rock which merely looked like a fast ship (13, 153-158). This curious adaptation to the original prophecy is difficult to justify in narrative terms and Homer offers no accompanying clues, at least none easily accessible to the modern reader. However, the net effect of this magical transformation is to leave the heart of the paradisal island intact and functioning, whilst the ship is preserved "close in" to Scheria (161) plainly to be seen from the shore (169) but turned into stone and "rooted" to the bottom of the sea (163). There it will stand for eternity, one imagines, in a conical form, looking like nothing more nor less than a small mountain or large *omphalos* stone, or the Tree of Life whose roots reach into the Underworld. In closing the navel-space that allowed transition between spiritual planes, Poseidon has had his revenge upon Odysseus; but in the process he has wittingly or otherwise confirmed Scheria as a World Centre, thus validating our earlier reading of "the shield upon the water" as an allusion to an omphalic centre marking a place of passage between worlds. Such an association would have drawn

the mythical island of the Phaiakians into the category of sacred centres such as Hyperborea, Olympia, Delphi and Delos, and imbued it with whatever qualities were commonly attributed to those enhanced landscapes and their prophetic functions.

It is not the first time that Zeus has conspired with Poseidon to bring revengeful destruction upon a defiant group or community. The *Iliad* tells how the invading army of Achaians built a wall and ditch on the landward side around their ships without making sacrifice to Poseidon, for which neglect the two gods resolved to destroy the wall once the Greeks had departed (*Iliad* 7, 442-463). More exactly, they will break the wall, scatter the pieces in the sea, and pile up sand over the beach to cover the place where it stood (459-463). Held in common with the destruction of the Phaiakian ship are the identity of the destroyers, the motive (revenge for lack of respect) and the permanent obliteration of original features. Buried under these narratives of destruction is the memory of a time when the stability of the World Axis suffered reversal, leading to the spiritual decline during the successive World Ages outlined by Hesiod in his *Works and Days*.

The construction of the Achaian wall is interesting. It is built in a sheltered place between promontories as an enclosure to the tomb of warriors who died in and around the river Skamandros (327-335). A gated wall with ramparts and towers is then constructed around a single "corpse-pyre" (336) where the bones are piled up. To all effects and purposes, the enclosure becomes a gated city where a tomb preserves the memory of valiant heroes. This tomb is a 'significant marker' fit to act as a token of foundation. It will of course fix the centre of the enclosure in the manner of a foundation stone, central in concept even if not, as far as we can tell, exactly central to the liminal terrain. In geometric terms the outcome is a circle enclosing a central point which corresponds to a World Centre *omphalos*, where passage between worlds is to occur.

Destruction, when it inevitably comes as predicted, ten years after the onset of the Trojan War, is accomplished by means of great floods. First Apollo and Poseidon release a veritable catalogue of rivers, "all the rivers that run to the sea from the mountains of Ida" (12, 19) including of course the murderous Skamandros; over the course of nine days the rivers are joined by incessant rains sent by Zeus forming a mighty, destructive deluge which carries stones and timbers into the sea (25-32). The beach disappears under sand and the rivers turn back to their courses. With the Achaians retreating in disarray to their ships, unprotected, Hektor fights like a *whirlwind*, encircled by his enemies but holding firm like a wild boar or lion at the mercy of huntsmen (i.e. a 'strong point marking the

centre of the totality', 40-48). There is still the ditch and its sharp stakes to circumvent, and the imagery of 'backrush' and 'onrush' takes over the thematic interplay of flooding and retreating rivers (71; 105ff.). A positive storm is whipped up when Achaians and Trojans alike begin to throw great stones ripped from the bastions which shower "like snowflakes" on both armies (154-161), but fall heavily, crashing like millstones (161). Hektor is likened to a boulder carried along a river bed by flood, and the advancing ranks of the Trojans are later likened to the onslaught of boiling waves whipped up by the stormblasts of Zeus (13, 795-801).

The survival of the wall was linked closely to the survival of Troy, the great citadel. It was promised that whilst the city of Priam is untaken, the wall shall hold (12, 9-12). The parallelism offers an invitation to see the two locations as reflections of the same principle, namely, each as a cosmic centre overthrown and submerged in the great waters of a flood. Particularly relevant are the 'turning back' of the rivers which evokes the 'backward flowing' Okeanos, and Hektor as a single boulder swept along the river's course may be a reference to the White Rock identified in these pages as the star Deneb at the centre of the Milky Way river.

Myths of Destruction, among which the destruction of the Phaiakian city or ship and the destruction of the Achaian wall[50] must be counted, belong in the arena of precessional myth, which relates the overturning of the World Axis and an inrush of cataclysmic flood waters marking the end of an Age. Markers of Precession are strong in this destruction of the wall which prefigures the fall of Troy itself in Homer's *Iliad*. Greek tradition is not unaware of the myth of a great deluge which brings about the destruction of civilisation and the annihilation of a race of men who have, in many cases, become too noisy, too populous or too arrogant. Hebrews and Christians alike grow up in familiarity with the Great Flood of Genesis, and the cosy tale of the entry of the animals into Noah's Ark is part of the cultural heritage of many children. Less often remembered are the sinister aspects of the event, in which God punishes the wicked arrogance of men (*Genesis* 6, 4f.) and washes away the corruption and violence then prevailing (ibid. 6, 11f.) with the harsh annihilation of all but a few life forms. The Biblical great deluge was sent to destroy "every living substance" (7, 4) and rose up from the "fountains of the great deep" or fell from the "windows of heaven" (7, 11) until even the mountains were covered. This deluge event belongs in the same context of punishment and retribution at the hands of the gods as recorded in the destruction of the Phaiakian ship and the overturning of the wall.

The best known of Greek flood traditions is the story of the survival of Deukalion and his wife who rode out the flood, Noah-like, until their craft

settled on the mountain peak of Parnassos (above the navel-centre of the world). All people of their race had perished, but the two survivors were able to throw the stones which were to become the 'bones' of a future race of men. (Here again is birth or life from the stone). The Deukalion myth owes much of its inspiration to Near Eastern flood myths as ancient as the fourth millennium BCE, nor are the myths exclusive to the ancient world; it is a universal theme told even by peoples living far from the sea, or for that matter distant from lakes or rivers.[51] Survival of such a very ancient mythologem in so many cultures and away from a maritime or riverine setting, offers more than adequate proof that 'destruction by flood' belongs to a greater order of disaster than the merely terrestrial.

Where once the ship had transported the hero along some magical *axis* reaching from Scheria to Ithaka, it is now rendered ineffectual, leaving the audience to wonder if any other human adventurer will ever travel the route again. The answer will perhaps be no, not if Zeus and Poseidon have their desired way in closing access to the world of the gods, as their intention seems to be. The petrified vessel has effectively 'closed the door' in closing the *omphalos.* And yet all may not be lost, if one recalls the two doors of the Egyptian horizon, one of which, the western, gives entry to the Underworld and closes behind the entrant, the other in the east opening to release the soul into a high place equivalent to Scheria.

'Culture heroes' and 'closed doors' coincide in a legend from central Polynesia,[52] which relates how the first man, Tiki, created a hole into the Underworld which gave the souls a route down to the home of 'old Maui'. After 'young Maui's' theft of fire, the hole was closed forever. Here is yet another 'closed door' and route of access denied as a consequence of mortal disobedience. The name repetition with appended adjectives 'old' and 'young' further implies a generational shift that may symbolise the passing of a Great Age.

It is unlikely that Odysseus would wish to make such a return voyage in the near future even if the 'door' had not closed behind him, for the returning hero has a further, bloody task to perform in reclaiming his *oikos* from the greedy suitors and his wife from their pressing demands for marriage. In this respect his human life span is incomplete and his duty, with remembrance of earthly responsibilities, has ostensibly drawn him back to the home country of the narrative. There are however, certain surprises in store.

Placing Scheria

Where in all the heavens can we locate the family of Alkinoös and the people of Scheria? A distinct possibility is the Pole Star, which has been the subject of so much myth-making in so many cultures and for so many centuries. For all its tendency to desert, every seven hundred years, the centrepoint of circumpolar space, the Pole Star is a reasonably accurate marker of both 'north' and 'constancy' quite sufficient for purposes of navigation and travel by land, if not for strict timekeeping. It was noted earlier that the poet recorded a displacement of the Phaiakians from a previous homeland, "a spacious land, Hypereia, next to the Cyclopes, who were men too overbearing" (6, 4f.). It seems they were harried out of their own land by a superior force, a detail in which the reader may recognise a transparently mythic rendering of a cyclic relocation of the polar centre. If this is a correct reading, then the Cyclopes may also be classified as malevolent agents regularly threatening the world order, and Odysseus' piercing of the eye with the great stave, the re-establishment of the stable *axis*. And of course the one-eyed giant tried to close the doorway between his island and the neighbouring Island of the Goats, by throwing boulders after the escaping ship.

With this in mind, let us review what potential markers of Pole Star position can be discovered in the description of Scheria. Already, the island's capacity for timeless productivity (the orchard of Alkinoös) has been explored at length here in terms of the 'suspension of time'. The Pole Star is the central representative of the fixed circumpolar stars which to the naked eye at least, do not move. Instead of spinning around the world, as our Sun and planets appear to do, the circumpolar stars allow a countless number of stellar bodies to revolve around *them*. And since we have always been accustomed to measure the passage of time by the passage of the Sun and the Moon, the 'unmoving' can only be the 'timeless'.

The feature of Scheria that most powerfully invokes the Pole Star lying close to the magnificent Great Bear, the group which acts as a pointer to the Pole Star itself, is the Wagon, known to English speakers as the Big Dipper. This humble vehicle ("the high one with the good wheels", 6, 58, = 70, …"that has the carrying basket"- the bowl of the dipper?) plays a part in the episode wherein Nausikaa takes her young companions to wash clothes at the shore, near the banks of the river where Odysseus will be cast up from the sea. It was an idea put into her head by Athene (36f.). Next, once their work is accomplished and the washing is drying in a line along the seashore, the girls happily set to playing a game of ball which prefigures the games later conducted on the dancing floor of Alkinoös'

palace by two most accomplished dancers (8, 259-264; 370-380). From this second reference to athletic young people dancing and ball-throwing, there emerges a strong solar reference which reminds the critical listener that, like the Mayans of ancient Mexico, Greek tradition also recreated the celestial progress of the Sun in symbolic games and activities involving a spherical toy. The Phaiakians are especially proud of their young men's skill and their swiftness in the dance, which they apparently conduct in a circle around the singer and player of the lyre, Demodokos (8, 262). The circle and its musical centre point ('harmony') evoke the ecliptic circle of the Sun as well as the whirling stars which dance around the fixed Pole Star. After the tale of Aphrodite and Ares (which has been suggested here as another stellar allegory) the dance is resumed by the two finest of the dancers, who toss a ball from one to the other. The Phaiakian ball is "a beautiful thing", "red" (8, 372f; this is one of very few instance of epithets of colour in Homeric verse) and is thrown up "to the shadowy clouds" by one fleet-footed dancer, to be caught easily by the other as it descends and before the dancer's feet touch the ground again (374ff.). At this stage the imagery evokes the rising and setting phases of the Sun, and the two dancers, the east and west horizons.

Lest it be considered over-imaginative to ascribe such a role to a simple game of 'catch', it is worth noting that in Egypt a scarab representing the dung beetle, no less, was a common image of the glorious Sun and its life-giving capacity. In spite of its inglorious lifestyle, the dung beetle was admired for its persistence in rolling a large ball of dung into its living chamber, to serve as food for the beetle and its offspring. This insect and its 'ball' came to represent not only the dawn Sun but also major esoteric aspects of solar renewal, specifically, 'transformation', or 'coming into being', from which scarabs were to acquire an amuletic function, being found on the breast of many an Egyptian mummy. They were so placed in the hope and expectation of the endurance of the soul into the Afterlife which was reached along the path of the Sun. Where symbols of life were concerned, it appears no creature or artefact was too humble to serve as a model of the solar phases on which so much depended in the archaic world.

So here on the dancing ground of the Phaiakians lies a possible astronomical reference which may place the Phaiakians in a central position in respect of the Sun, and in close relation with its movements. But the wagon is really the most powerful indicator of place in this particular adventure. The two most identifiable circumpolar asterisms in the north of our skies are the Great and Little Bears (Ursa Major and Ursa Minor) which both form the shape of a 'dipper' or 'ladle' or 'plough'.

Homer used both the names by which the Dipper is universally known, when he placed the group on the famous Shield of Achilleus: "the Bear, whom men also give the name of the Wagon" (18, 487) The wagon was a common means of transport in the ancient world once men had learned to harness the ox, the donkey or the horse, and it is no surprise to learn that early battle chariots were also modelled on the familiar rustic cart. Gavin White[53] writes of the Babylonian wagon in his account of early star-lore in that culture, that the cart or wagon came to be regarded as the marker of the celestial pole, which is also, he says, the home of the North Wind; in its apparent unchanging stability it also came to be seen as a symbol of eternity in that country. He does not make any connection to the Hyperborean legend of the paradise that lies behind or beyond the North Wind, but we shall happily do so for him, for such an insight brings Scheria and its inhabitants firmly into the category of dwellers in the timeless point of stability and fruitfulness.

Wagon and Chariot

Such central points have here been consistently named as *omphaloi*. There can be no more powerful *omphalos* than the centre of the skies where the Finns saw in imagination the Nail of Heaven anchoring the upper limit of the great cosmic tree, and where the Hindus saw the point where the waters of the Milky Way flowed out to pour into their sacred river, the Ganges. This and the ancient Indian cosmic and mystical symbolism of the chariot wheel, hub (and axis, axle and / or *axis*) justifies consideration of Homer's employment of his Scherian chariot, and possibly other such vehicles, as possible cosmic symbols having particular reference to the sky-wagon of the North Pole. Certainly, chariot races in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* deserve detailed study in their own right, especially in consideration of the well-researched cosmic symbolism of the Roman chariot race[54] in Circus or Hippodrome; in addition, the meaning and use of the Homeric *terma* (as a *sema*, line or limit, a turning post) in both Greek and Roman tradition could reveal a complex interplay of astronomical and metaphysical referents too far-reaching to be engaged with at this late stage. Nor may the wagon of Priam which he took to the shores of the Underworld to recover the body of his son Hektor, and which is described in lavish detail in the *Iliad* (24, 265-274) detain us at this juncture, much as it would add solidly to the argument for celestial wagons and a hugely cosmic subtext to both Epics. Likewise, the chariot of Hera which is harnessed in the *Iliad* with even greater attention to its iron, gold and silver magnificence, "a wonder to look upon" (5, 720-732;

cf. 10, 436-440) *"thauma idesthai"* (725)[55] would deserve greater scrutiny. Its departure from "the gates of the sky" guarded by the Hours (748-751); and equally its passage across "the way between" – which is presumably a space between those gates and the peak of Olympos where they are to meet great Zeus (754) offers further material for analysis of a cosmological nature. Such hyperbole and spatial reference as that used in these critical passages imply a wider canvas than mere terrestrial geography could provide. In one way or another they demonstrate that the chariot - or the humbler wagon - may be elaborated as a cosmic vehicle similar to those widely used as solar chariots of the gods (or ascending prophets and seers) in many ancient cultures.

The *Omphalos* of the Chariot

One area in which we can confidently proceed with a cosmological interpretation based on strong linguistic evidence lies on Homer's surprising use of the Greek term '*omphalos*' in his description of a certain mechanical part of the wagon-derived chariot. The noun is most familiar from Kalypso's island where it is associated, by juxtaposition, with the columns (*axes*) of Atlas (1, 50-54), this and the stud of the shield being the only other uses of the term; and Scheria is memorably "the shield on the water", in which capacity the boss or navel-*omphalos* marks the centre point of a shield, itself a formal reiteration of the circle of the skies. The Pole Star or polar point is the defining marker of that particular centre and particularly so, if - and when - the water in question is the cosmic sea of the night sky.

The range of latent meanings given to *omphalos* by Liddell, Scott and Jones begins with the navel as body part and extends from there into metaphoric applications based on 'navel' as 'centre': the keystone of an arch, for example, the centre of the Earth (as at Delphi), or an altar which 'centres' ritual activity; equally, the semantic range covers the threshing floor, the tomb, and individual fruits: equal images, surely, of renewal and fertility which are relevant to the mystic Centre; finally, *omphalos* can apply to the centre of an army where it parts into two wings, in which instance the reference is to the unfolding of the One into the Many from the point of emanation.

It is as the small protuberance on the yoke of a chariot, translated by Lattimore as "knob" or "horn"[56] that the use of *omphalos* in the *Odyssey* is most obscure but ultimately revealing. Reconstructions of early chariots from ancient drawings show this item standing vertically at the centre of the crossbar on the yoke collar of the horses, where that crossbar is joined

by the pole *('polos')*.[57] Autenrieth[58] has two illustrations showing this item of harness, where the *omphalos* appears to be a device where the two reins controlling the steeds are threaded through a guiding piece. The *omphalos* is at the centre of the yoke where the pole links that yoke to the body of the chariot, so the pole joins the centre-yoke (*omphalos*) in its function as an *axis mundi*. Thus the *omphalos* not only fulfils the idea of centrality but, being a solidly vertical feature, the idea of the meeting place of four horizontal directions with the vertical; and this omphalic 'centre of the four' is confirmed by its junction with the *polos* / *axis*. Additionally, 'reins', as 'ropes', are commonly used in early metaphor to symbolise the bindings of the globe which pin it to the heavens. It has already been noted that Plato's *Myth of Er* uses them in this fashion as girdles of the Earth. And although Egyptian imagery of the North Pole uses the 'thigh of the bull' to represent the central point of the northern sky, it also on occasion shows a mooring post and ropes by which the circling, circumpolar stars are 'tethered' to the midpoint.[59]

This application of *omphalos* proves, if nothing else, that functional parts of the chariot could be viewed as replications of cosmic phenomena. As to whether *all* the chariots or wagons named by Homer are exclusively appearances of the several 'Big Dippers' in the sky I leave to the judgment of my readers.

If indeed Nausikaa's wagon full of washing hints at a polar location for Scheria, as I believe, a place must be found elsewhere for the home of Penelope and Odysseus, and since Ithaka is of even greater importance than Scheria in the narrative scheme of things, it must be expected that its stellar location will bear equal or greater significance.

Where is Ithaka?

Odysseus was offered immortality by Kalypso in the south, omniscience by the Sirens in the north and has finally turned aside from a blissful life in paradise which marriage to Nausikaa would have granted him in the extremely distant celestial north, possibly at the North Pole Star. Ithaka and Penelope are his immutable destination and his destiny. By implication, the celestial status of Ithaka (and its attendant metaphysical qualities) must either outrank immortality, omniscience and beatitude or be preferred to it by one who pursues another criterion. On such identification as this will hang the inherent purpose of the cosmic journey of Odysseus and the final measure of his achievement in gaining his *nostos*. If a home cannot be found for Ithaka, the premise of our argument for a cosmic drama of transformation will fall apart for lack of

consistency; it is essential that the end support the beginning and all that lies between.

The “good nurse of men” deserves a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

RETURN TO ITHAKA

Few problems in the mapping of Homer's world have caused more controversy and debate than the location of Odysseus' island.[1] Ithaka (or modern Ithaki /Thiaki) has several geographical features which correspond to the description given to the Phaiakians by Odysseus, and another provided by Athene in reminding the returning hero of his rugged but fertile homeland, still at that time obscured to him by the misty obfuscations of the helpful goddess (13, 187-196). Yet none of the information provided by the poet has been sufficient to convince his readers that they do in truth know the original island of Odysseus and Penelope, nor does the archaeological record contain enough to confirm such an interpretation.[2] Sadly, the origins of the Epic in oral tradition, if not the received text, are so ancient there is no way of knowing whether the territory might have received its name in the wake of the famous tales of the Achaian warriors and their adventures, rather than long before. Such an aetiological process, projecting myth or legend backwards onto a particular location geographically very similar to Homer's Ithaka, would also explain the evidence of early cult discovered there in a cave of the Bay of Phorkys. The problem is currently unresolved.

Here is what the hero says of his island in the court of Alkinoös, information which is later closely echoed in some supportive lines from Athene as they stand together on the shore of that same bay of Phorkys, though Odysseus does not yet know the identity of his companion.

From Odysseus we hear:

> "I am at home in sunny Ithaka. There is a mountain
> there that stands tall, leaf-trembling Neritos, and there are islands
> settled around it, lying one very close to another.
> There is Doulichon and Same, wooded Zakynthos,
> but my island lies low and away, last of all on the water
> toward the dark, with the rest below facing east and sunshine..."
>
> 9, 21-26.

From Athene:

> "There are indeed many who know it,
> whether among those who live toward the east and the sunrise,
> or those who live up and away toward the mist and darkness."
> 13, 239-241.

The most challenging lines are those of Odysseus which refer to the "low-lying" of the island, its position towards the dark, and a distinction between this and other lands facing east and sunshine (9, 25f.). To this we shall return. Another enigma consists in knowing how the land could possibly lie "toward the dark" and yet be "sunny". This seems to be a formulaic element which can be discovered elsewhere (cf. 9, 21; 13, 212). Conventionally, darkness has always been related to a far western position, the sunset direction, and at the furthest extreme from Greek territories which lie in the east of the Mediterranean. However if we consider the sunlight of Ithaka as a doublet of the glittering effulgence of the great houses of Menelaos and Alkinoös, another more meaningful interpretation springs to mind, namely that Ithaka, like the houses of these other great kings, refers to a bright star set in a black sea.

For the moment let us see what Homer does tell us about his Ithaka. It is one of a cluster of four islands (Doulichion, Same, Zakynthos (9, 24) and Ithaka), though Odysseus' island stands somewhat apart (25). Wherever Homer's Ithaka may lie, it is part of a larger cluster; the poet has declined to be specific about the number, the location and the relationship (if any) between parts of the whole. The only certainty is that Ithaka is the target of Odysseus' homecoming and since it is associated with Penelope and his ancestors, Ithaka must be counted the first in importance.

Ithaka has a tall mountain, Neritos, on which trees grow (22). Athene reminds him that it is not a suitable place for horses, being too rugged (13, 242) but it is well enough watered ("always rain and the dew", 245) to produce grain and vines, cattle, goats and timber (241-247). This rainfall will later be seen as crucial to Ithaka's identity. Lacking however are any references to supernatural, time-defying abundance, or freedom from age or disease, from which it may be deduced that this is not an Olympian-style Isle of the Blessed. Ithaka functions on a more domestic scale, with one notable exception still to be considered. There are some indicators of fertility, and of felicity, too, judging by the depth of Odysseus' affection for a place "sweeter" than any other he knows (9, 28) and it is a good nurse of character (27), an observation affirmed by the integrity of Telemachos and his mother in the face of the gross provocation of the suitors. Above all, from the first book Ithaka has been portrayed as a place

where social order has always until this moment reigned undisputed but is now gravely threatened. This fact is totally relevant to the cosmic identity of the olive tree in the marital chamber. Although never named as an 'ideal state' in the manner of a Mount Olympos or Alkinoös' township, the probity of the family and the guardianship of the tree are more than sufficient to mark Ithaka as comparable paradisal territory of the kind so far encountered at the edge of the world or high in the sky.

The essential markers of an *axis* place in the bay of Phorkys (and elsewhere, according to Odysseus and Athene) are the Tree (more than one, but especially the olive where the Phaiakians depose his treasure, and where Athene and Odysseus converse, seated with their backs to the trunk; 13, 119-122; 372) and the Mountain (trees growing on tall Neritos); and for the power-infused *omphalos* places we have the *oikos* itself, and the Cave of the Nymphs. There are of course several other *omphaloi*, particularly the store room, the bedchamber, and the orderly encircled pig farm of Eumaios. If all of these last do indeed have a cosmic value, they could be read as 'spheres within spheres'. It is admitted that without deeper analysis such interpretations are unsupported. Nevertheless we may consider them in the wider context of all that has gone before and investigate whether or not a cosmic positioning of Ithaka can sustain the argument as a whole.

For this reason it is vital to bring into play all the information given concerning Ithaka. The lines from book 9 can usefully be related to others from book 13 which contain the words of the goddess Athene, for who better to describe a divine location? Odysseus, newly landed on Ithaka by the Phaiakians from their 'flying boat' does not know where he is, and she must remind him gently of his own homecoming. The two passages quoted above may appear to contain formulaic repetitions, but in fact do not. Athene has made a distinction between *people* whose minds are focused on sunlight, and others who live in a world of darkness which, in Lattimore's translation lies both *up* and away. She speaks more objectively as the voice of the knowledgeable onlooker, whereas Odysseus' account is subjective and seen from his own mind's eye. The hero speaks of his island as low and away, "towards the dark", while others "face" the east, just as others "live" towards the east in Athene's speech. Where are the "people" named by Athene to be found (do they live east, west, or north?) and where does the homeland of Odysseus lie (again, east, west, or north?). And which central point of reference defines the various directions? Lines 25 and 26 of Odysseus' statement in book 9 are clear about the east "and sunshine". This is the place where other 'islands' are to be found; it is not the place where Ithaka lies. For Athene, the east and

sunrise on the one hand and the land of darkness on the other are identified as quarters in which people are familiar with Odysseus' island. No great enigma arises here and the east may safely be left to itself. Nevertheless it would be understandable if the hero's description of Ithaka as "towards the dark" were to be taken as indicating west, for the simple reason that the *quality* of what is "dark" is opposite to the quality "sunshine", which we are told lies in the east, and the two qualities attract each other as quantifying spatial objects. But it must be remembered that darkness can lie elsewhere, in effect anywhere including space beyond the Sun or the depths of cosmic night.

The phrase "low and away, last of all on the water" is used by Odysseus to locate Ithaka "toward the dark", and Athene's "up and away toward the mist and darkness" describes the land of "others" to whom Ithaka's renown is familiar. There is no reason to think that the same dark and misty place is intended in each case. But some element has to be adjusted if any directional sense is to be gathered from the text as we have it. An explanation is offered here which accepts the lines as they stand and considers them as an intended repetition, despite the variations, on the assumption that Odysseus and Athene are discussing the same place and that Athene's reference to 'those who know of Ithaka' is a generalising element, but not without relevance. More emphasis may be placed on the word 'below' in Odysseus' speech which identifies the east: "with the rest *below* facing east and sunshine", according to which Ithaka must by default lie 'above'. The outcome is that the lower level belongs to true sunshine, as humans experience it, and is identified in terms of the most critical moment in the lives of people dependent on solar light and solar fertilising power granted by the reassuring daily reappearance of the Sun in the east at dawn. By contrast, an upper level associated with Ithaka is placed in a darkness which may belong to the cosmic sea, and the 'sunny-ness' named in 9, 21 is read as an effulgence of stellar light.

There remains the problem of "low and away" which complicates the image of an island named Ithaka high in the sky, that is, in the celestial north. Nevertheless the geographer Strabo was moved to place Ithaka "farthest of all towards the north",[3] an imaginative statement which makes sense if his north is read as an Hyperborean north, that is, the north of the upper skies of a three-dimensional world.

Ithaka is Odysseus' own paradise, his blessed island and the centre of his world and his being. He wants no other. But what exactly gives Ithaka importance in its own right, quite apart from its meaning to Odysseus? On what grounds may Athene claim that it is known and famed throughout, apparently, the upper and lower worlds? A very different picture emerges

if the whole group of islands named by the poet is lifted up into a celestial location to become a visible asterism or constellation. As a member of a stellar group, Ithaka could then find a place at the lower edge of the skies ("low" perhaps meaning low on the horizon?) and at some distance from it ("away, last of all on the [cosmic] water"), perhaps deeper or higher into the firmament.

For the present, Ithaka remains as a well-known island or star associated with the west; and the darkness in question may belong to the west, or it may be an expression of the darkness of night, or both. Or the poet may be describing a group of stars which transit the northern sky, successively occupying more than one of the extended terrestrial compass directions. As this story proceeds, it will be shown that the island most likely to have given a home to the hero belongs successively to east, west and the highest and most central north, in relation to which the territories described by Athene must necessarily lie on a lower plane occupied by people dwelling in sunshine, who cannot help but know the beauty of the 'island' above them in the night sky.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CHAOS AT THE CENTRE OF THE SKY

Death and disaster are soon to be meted out by the returning master of Ithaka in revenge for the predations of the suitors who have violated the sanctity of his hall. This achieved, Odysseus will at last be reunited with Penelope, when he will learn whether his wife has stayed constant in his absence and whether she has preserved the great secret hidden at the heart of their bedchamber.

An astronomical connection is the only viable interpretation of an island where an olive tree pillar symbolising the *axis* of the world is enclosed in the *oikos*, and where the restitution of order, or the banishment of its antithesis, disorder, provides the climactic dénouement to a series of tragic advancements and failures. The first task of the returning master is to deploy the strength and insight gained during his spiritual transformation to the defeat of the suitors and the restoration of correct social conduct. Much is achieved with the supernatural assistance of his spiritual guide, Athene, the encouragement of Zeus and the robust support of Odysseus' son and his loyal servants, especially Eumaios and Eurykleia who have maintained the task of ordering outside and within, in the absence or incapacity of Odysseus and Penelope whose task this should properly be. Yet the island has its own inbuilt strength which, if all is well and the secret faithfully preserved, should have guaranteed the integrity of place, and far, far more: the balance of universal order. The symbol of Ithaka's immutable strength is this very olive tree that grows at the centre of the bedchamber. But does it still stand firm?

Understanding the tree may ultimately help us to understand the island. The Ithakan olive occupies the same symbolic territory as the 'mill tree' or wooden axle which supported the turning 'millstone' of the sky which fell when the millstone broke in two in the Norse legend. And the exhausted miller woman, one of twelve such workers employed to turn the hand mills, but the weakest (20, 105-119) whose audible prayer comes as a good omen to her master Odysseus, may well belong to the same style of precessional myth as the Scandinavian miller-sisters equally worn down by toil.

In the later saga, two strong slave women grind out peace and plenty by turning the millstone in the hall of Frodi. But he, the king, is too greedy; and the millstone, "not come from the Earth," eventually shatters. It is a Myth of Precession involving the rupture of the stone upon its axle / *axis*, with the standard array of attendant disasters. The women immediately experience a terrible vision of an approaching enemy host intent on destroying the palace by fire.[1] When the Homeric and Scandinavian 'palace disasters' are placed side by side for comparison, it becomes apparent that they may share a common ancestry, for all their temporal distance. But first, we must consider the all-important tree and its role in the denouement of the Epic.

The suitors are finally dead, the disobedient servants punished, the hall fumigated and restored to good order. Yet still Penelope has not recognised the wretched beggar standing before her as the husband she longs for. In her continuing grief she refutes the message of the old nurse Eurykleia who announces that Odysseus is home, in the house, having killed the suitors (23, 1-9). She must be mad, exclaims her mistress, driven crazy by the gods, and the excitable servant has disturbed the first happy sleep Penelope has enjoyed since Odysseus departed for Ilion. In fact Penelope is due to 'awake' now from the ignorance of the 'forgetting' state into which she had fallen, in tune with Odysseus in *his* dreaming state, the husband with whom she is of one mind. Her joy at the good news is muted by her mistrustful fear that the message may be in error. She must see for herself and she must test the impostor. So queenly Penelope descends from her chamber and finds the un-named beggar seated by the fire at the tall pillar (23, 88-90, just as Arete and Alkinoös sat in their shining hall (6, 305-309) and where Odysseus had previously been seated in the hall of Alkinoös. The victor of the battle in the hall has taken his true place as leader of this Ithakan household, sitting where any true master would sit in affirmation of his kingly identity with the pillar as *axis*. As part of a subtext, the many parallels with Scheria serve to equate stellar Ithaka with the most important asterism in the northern night sky, the Pole Star.

The decision is made to impose a "test of signs that only [they] know of", which are "secret from others" (23, 109f.) And so the great test of the olive tree bed is set in motion by Penelope with a seemingly casual aside to the servant Eurykleia to make up the bed for Odysseus "*outside* the well fashioned chamber" (177f., emphasis added). The anger of Odysseus is boundless and he is hurt deeply in his heart. The bed *cannot* be moved, built as it is around the trunk of a tree growing in the centre of the chamber, thick, like a (stone) column, leaves still growing strongly,

curiously still living despite the trimming and planing carried out by Odysseus (190-199).[2] No man however strong could possibly move it, yet this is what Odysseus fears. Only a god could achieve such a feat, it is implied, and he has had too much recent experience of malevolent deities to be able to trust their intentions. But of course some cosmic power in the form of a 'god' could bring about a disastrous precessional shift.

A test of identity is a perfect narrative resolution to the homecoming and a fine prelude to the sweet reunion that follows. But why, we ask, this particularly cryptic format? We have a tree that is a pillar and a bed post, all at the same time. It is a stone column, but once long ago it had bark and leaves, as a tree. The living olive is firmly locked into the bedchamber that Odysseus built with his own hands and few know of its existence. Yet Odysseus seriously fears that it has been moved and he is driven to a rare and intense anger at a moment of reunion when all should now be moving towards happy resolution. Perhaps he doubts his wife's fidelity and the betrayal of the secret; even so, no ordinary man, especially those of the calibre of the worthless suitors (incapable even of stringing the bow) could have done what he dreads. Like a father who fears that his child is lost, his reaction on hearing that all is well is that anger which masks unspeakable fear.

All becomes clear when it is accepted that only the Axis of the World can be both, or either, column and tree; and the Axis stands at the idealised *omphalos*-centre of the world.

The tree-as-bed had a much earlier antecedent as the 'Huluppu tree' ("a solitary willow") of Inanna, the Sumerian goddess, who just like Odysseus made a descent to the Underworld. Originally to be found growing wild on the banks of the Euphrates as a young tree at the dawn of the world, the mature Huluppu was taken by her brother Gilgamesh to the garden of the goddess after the south wind had torn it from the ground and flood waters (once again) had carried it along the primal stream.[3]

With the passing of the years the Huluppu tree grew stout, it became home to a thunderbird in its branches, a demon-maiden in its trunk, and a snake in its roots; so three beings defining the realms of air, middle ground and underworld confirmed the tree in its axial role as linear connection of Heaven and Earth. The tree ends its days as 'a throne-bed' crafted by Gilgamesh, who has been able to drive out the bird, the demon and the snake. Such motifs cry out for explication in terms of the Odyssean parallels, most particularly the tree which in time becomes a bed, but there is also the violence of its uprooting, and an associated flood or similar cosmic disaster.

There is only one way that an axial replica such as this living wooden post made from the sacred tree of Athene could be uprooted from its firm grasp on the ground of the *oikos*. The narrative level is the foreground to a mystical sense which is so fearful that few would care to set it to words.

The greatest anxiety known to man, even in those distant times before the age of scientific instrumentation, was whether the Earth would remain steady on its familiar axis. Would it tilt, leaving the patterns of day and night upon which all life is predicated, seriously out of kilter? This is no petty anxiety: the Precession of the Equinoxes was experienced and remembered, orally transmitted, *universally*, in the language of myth and legend (this being a major historical resource in the pre-literate age) long before Hipparchos made his so-called discovery of the phenomenon circa 125 BCE. His must have been a re-discovery, assisted by recorded observations, of a truth buried for many centuries in the dusty language of his ancestors until advances in literacy and mathematics finally enabled Greek astronomers to make sense of what they saw and the stories they already knew.

Many readers may consider this a bold statement. It is however supported by the many recent scholarly researches which have unravelled the verifiable astronomical content of mythologies as distantly disposed as those of South American indigenous peoples, Egyptian pyramid builders, Scandinavian poets of the great northern sagas, and conceivably anywhere that held to the cult of a World Pillar *axis*. These cultures and many others uphold traditions of a great world-bearing Tree of Life which preserves the balance of the universe. That it should be upset is a universal cause of anxiety, whether it has been configured in cultural variations as diverse as totem poles, sacrificial horse posts, sacred anthills with a central timber,[4] or kingpillars of the house. Odysseus' fear that the secret of the *omphalos* chamber may have been revealed is entirely commensurate with early knowledge of the catastrophic consequences of Precession. If the World Pillar which sustains life through its connection with the universal guiding force of the gods is uprooted, there will be flood, fire and earthquake on cataclysmic levels; an Age will have come to an end just as the Golden Age of heroes in the time of Kronos was ended. At that happy time, before disaster struck (or so Hesiod relates in his *Works and Days,* 110-122) the land was fertile and no man suffered illness or bitter old age, but lived like a god, close to the gods and at peace. Hesiod does not tell us how this perfect age came to a close, but he is clear that Kronos was supplanted by Zeus and that there followed three more successive Ages displaying a steady deterioration from the ideal of the previous Golden Age. The Vedic tradition of India has preserved in greater detail the mathematical basis of

such mythical Ages, and the Asian system is disturbingly accurate, in true scientific as opposed to mythic terms.[5] Indirectly and in mythic language both Hesiod and Homer are referring to that wobble of the Earth's geographic axis which disturbs the patterns in the sky responsible for the 'right-ordering' or 'right-running' of Earth. No wonder Odysseus is so angry with his wife: there is so much at stake. Has she revealed the secret? Perhaps in admitting the suitors to her household - or even to her bed - she has allowed the forces of disorder to take over and compromise the stability of the universe? Upon her fidelity, her strength and faithful preservation of the mystical bond with her husband (that is, her 'remembering' of all that is good, true, orderly and just) the fate of the cosmos depends. There was little doubt that she would remain true, but the combined forces of the suitors must in this analysis be viewed as inimical cosmic forces capable of undermining the symbol of Ithaka's stability.

The Greeks were well acquainted with the danger of changes in stellar pattern. Plato recorded in his *Timaeus* the very real terror provoked by the idea of loss of contact with familiar celestial bodies: those stars and "*planetos*" (wandering stars) which periodically disappear then reappear, causing fear and anxious conjecture among the people who fail to understand their variability, are a source of particular worry.[6] Specific mention is made of the horrors of Precession in the speech of Critias, who has been informed of the "youth" and "ignorance" of the Greeks by an Egyptian priest. Part of the said "ignorance" is the Greek incomprehension of the myth of Phaethon's fall, when the flaming chariot of the Sun burnt up things on the Earth. The truth is, says Critias, that there *are* variations in the course of the heavenly bodies, and these may lead to wholesale destruction by fire.[7] Many deluges have occurred also, and wiped out many fine men and cities, he adds. So the disasters traditionally associated with Precession are evident here.

In recent decades several mythographers have been guided by the inspired interpretations of De Santillana and von Dechend and other original research in anthropology to unravel many obscurities of myth and folklore. The results have revealed an astounding prevalence of precessional knowledge in all major cultures of the world. Jane Sellers (1992) has interpreted precessional symbolism in Egyptian art and literature; Thomas Worthen (1991) has defined and applied a paradigmatic schema to the analysis of precessional mythology in several cultures; and William Sullivan (1996) has found the same ideas at work among the ancient Inca community in South America. In every case, the fall of the *axis* (whether in the form of axle, column, mountain, pole or tree) is accompanied by the dawn of a New Age characterised by the overturning

of the previous one, accompanied by flood, fire and loss of life. These mythologies are as old as the barely understood but definitely cosmic hymns of the *Vedas*.[8]

Those requiring a more radical proof of early knowledge of Precession will find it in the sexagesimal system still used in the present numbering of time and space, the sequence 60-120-180-360, which applies both to the hours of the day and the degrees of the circle, using base 60. These are equally the basis of the Hindu *yugas* or Great Ages and the metrical scheme of the *Vedas*, the Sumerian calendar and king lists, and many universal myths, all inspired by the just-visible annual precessional shift of 50 seconds in one year, one degree in 72 years, 30 degrees in 2,160 years (when the Sun will begin to rise at dawn in a neighbouring house of the Zodiac, to westwards of the previous house), 60 degrees in 4,320 years, 120 degrees in 8,640 years, 180 degrees in 12,960 years, and so on to 360 degrees in 25,920 years, when the Sun will finally have completed its full precessional cycle.[9] The Sumerians were acquainted with the cycle, also known as the Great Year, even before they had mastered the art of writing.

As a working hypothesis it is confidently suggested that the great olive tree of Odysseus' island represents that *axis mundi* which has variant forms and replications, many of which we have discovered barely concealed within Homeric epic poetry. From all the assembled information it has become clear that wherever the sacred vertical marker is set up by man, or assumed to have been found by him, a connection with the gods is verified and acted upon as if it were a divine and cosmic axis. Ithaka's secret *axis*-tree may even represent not some axial replica of the kind intended, say, to bring blessings on the house in the manner of a domestic hearth or altar, but *the* central Axis of the World; that being so, it would define the island of Ithaka as the marker of a crucial central point in the visible sky. Here is an interpretation having tremendous potential for understanding the course and purpose of the hero's journey, and more, for this is the most powerful of the *Odyssey*'s various signs, its highlighted *semata*, and it cannot be overlooked that its presence is pivotal in creating a resounding climax to the resolution of the epic narrative.

Returning to the *Odyssey,* we know the tree has its roots in Ithaka. If it can be determined precisely where the tree grows, it will give a placement for the island itself. A celestial placement which might leave the tree with downward-growing branches presents no problem, since Homer has already introduced us to the inverted fig tree, and its pan-Indo-European prototype (inverted or otherwise) has already generated many other examples of the vital line of communication flowing from above to below, and below to above, along the trunk of a fruitful tree rooted in the

Underworld, or the navel of the sea, the counterpart to the starry centre of the Heavens. Whether it occurs as the *Haoma* tree of the Persians ("to the soul he is the way to heaven"),[10] the *Soma* tree of Vedic India, the Akkadian Tree of Life, or the "dark pine of Eridu" whose roots penetrated the abyss of Hea, its "station" the centre of the Earth and its crown in Heaven's vault, "crystal white,"[11] the tree is one and the same. But as so often made apparent, the esoteric substance of the tree can be replicated in the human form; the same may be said for those servants of the gods who have the power of speech, such as one of the earliest recorded gods in the Greek pantheon,[12] Hermes the psychopomp, and the other divinity who exemplifies the gods' line of communication, mighty Atlas.

Atlas and Hermes

"Malignant" Atlas, whom we met early in the first book of the *Odyssey* as the one "who has discovered / all the depths of the sea, and himself sustains the towering / columns which bracket Earth and sky and hold them together" (1, 52-54) is revealed by P. R. Hardie (1983) to be the human personification of that *axis*-tree which ties northern heavens to a more southerly abyss. Little wonder therefore that in later tradition the mighty sustainer of the heavens begins *to spin*, just as the Earth turns around its pole,[13] or that the god lends his name to a North African mountain, the latter yet another *axis*-form linking Earth to the skies.

Meanwhile, Homer's term for the well-fashioned, upright bedpost in the recognition scene is "*erma"* (23, 198); this brings us to the particular symbolism of *Hermes* as psychopomp. The bedposts where Hephaistos strung his invisible net to entrap the adulterous lovers Ares and Aphrodite (8, 276-281) are also so named ("*ermisin*", 278). This is also the Greek name of the cairn or pile of stones commonly set up to mark a place of burial, and the custom of adding a stone to the heap which is still practised even today goes back to a mark of respect offered to the dead by travellers. Since stones, as well as pillars, were widely worshipped as deities (or the homes of deities) it is therefore unsurprising that *erma* shared a name with the god Hermes the psychopomp, and that a custom grew which established the anthropomorphic wayside 'herm' as a grave marker and boundary stone. Properly speaking, *erma* referred to either an ordinary stone or the upright pole or stone crowning the heap. Here is a collection of etymological clues to Hermes in an axial role, substituting for the original wooden upright but still associated with the journey to another world. His history is as ancient as the Linear B tablets.[14] Moreover, the four-sided statuary 'herm' for which he is best known refers to the meeting

of the six directions (four horizontal, two vertical) at the omphalic point where the post or statue is set in the earth, which also explains the placement of the herm at crossroads. The *Odyssey* has therefore introduced the reader to a god who, over time, has travelled effortlessly between three planes (air, Earth and sea, and underworld home of Kalypso) and acted in a cosmic role. This ancient messenger was after all the grandson of Atlas by Atlas' daughter, Maia, so he belongs to high places (born on Mt. Kyllene) and gives his name to the Hill of Hermes ("*ermaios lophos*") where Eumaios keeps watch above the city (16, 471). From this axial perspective, it is easier to understand how Hermes flies so effortlessly between the homes of Circe and Kalypso and why in broader contexts he should find a mythic partner in Hestia, who is not only the goddess of the hearth (a prime *omphalos* symbol) but also an exemplar of wisdom and strength,[15] which are equally prime axial qualities.

The Unstable Pivot

This treatment of the *Odyssey* has taken us along some twisting highways through mythic recastings of events in the firmament. Finally, modern astronomy can come to our aid in fixing a place high above, where the tree can be anchored as a mythic abstraction, but not however without some complexity due to the shifting pattern of our skies. Had it not already been allocated to Scheria, a likely candidate for celestial Ithaka might been found in the North Pole Star which stands above our north terrestrial Pole (NTP), but skywatchers aware of Precession could not have failed to notice that the polar point does not remain permanently fixed to a particular star. (The Pole Star was once identified as Thuban in Draco, but is currently with Polaris and will remain so for millennia to come, though sliding successively into *gamma* Cephei and *delta* Cygni). In between shifting from star to star, the world's axis (and its conceptual *axis mundi)* is without a home. *It wanders through black space*. During the Bronze Age years from 2200 BCE and later, into the fourteenth century CE, the pole did not arrive within 10 degrees of a visible star, which left the observer without an exact point of reference for the fixing of his bearings on land or sea and also robbed calendrical measurements of their required accuracy.

Up until now it has been sufficient to relate celestial travel to the most readily identifiable paths in the sky, but finally the entry of precessional themes into the story forces us to turn our gaze away from the earth-rooted, north-south terrestrial axis linked to a shifting North Pole Star and away, too, from the circle of constellations in the Zodiac which further

define the Sun's passage. There is a particular disadvantage in reliance on the Zodiacal houses as markers of solar transit, in that Precession involves the shifting of the equinoctial points which determine the ideal plane of the Earth, as well as the relocation of solstices marking the turn of the seasons. The latter will travel (unseen of course, as they have no material existence) across the sky, just like the stars which *are* visible. The only way for the early observer to calculate their position without instruments was to relate their progress to the passage of a neighbouring star or asterism, most preferably one that was easily recognisable for its brightness, for example, or for a memorable configuration. Yet since the relationship of a particular equinoctial point with a particular star will rupture approximately every seven hundred years, inevitably there will have been times when the equinox or solstice was without a home, as it will be again. Therefore we must consider another significant theoretical construct, the pole of the ecliptic (representing the centre around which the Sun rotates in orbit, the NCP, or north celestial pole) and the star or stars which identify the projection of this pole. Since Odysseus has most likely travelled the full circumference of the ecliptic, a homecoming which recognises the centre of *that* circle seems most appropriate.

Another Centre of the Sky

The Pole Star is adequate for rule of thumb measurement on the basis of its ready visibility and the helpful pointer of the stars of the Big Dipper, signalled by Homer as one of the stars useful to Odysseus. But the *truly useful and reliable stars* are the highly accurate stars of the Pleiades which mark out the major turning points of the solar year and have the added advantage of six very bright stars forming a smaller version of the more famous 'Dipper'. And here at last, I believe, we have come to Odysseus' own stellar islands.

Any book dedicated entirely to the ancient and universal importance of the Pleiades would be hard-pressed to cover the multitude of myths associated with this apparently insignificant little asterism tucked into the shoulder of Taurus, the Great Bull, and shown clearly there on Mithraic monuments. A brief description must suffice here, beginning with the purely astronomical pattern that these stars trace across the sky. In the fifth century BCE on the co-ordinate of Athens, the Pleiades had their heliacal rising around the 17 - 19 May and their setting on November 6th. These dates in spring and autumn vary little and always mark the intermediate ('quarter') days between the equinoxes and the solstices, the latter already noted as difficult to determine. (Between 900 and 700 BCE at the 39°

latitude of Smyrna, reputedly Homer's birth city, the Pleiades were visible from dusk until dawn between September 1st. and November 2nd). Due to their passage across the skies on a path symmetrically opposite to the Sun, the Pleiades provide a priceless guide to the passage of time during the hours of darkness, being visible for up to fourteen hours at Homer's latitude. Once a year these stars reach their culmination in November as they cross the meridian at midnight, when they will have gained their maximum altitude from the point of the observer's horizon. Another part of their importance from the second millennium onwards was the fact that during this period the Sun rose at dawn in the sign of Taurus at the vernal equinox, the spring marker of life's renewal, which would render the Pleiades in Taurus the visible confirmation of that new solar phase. Moreover, as the Sun set in the west during these Bronze Age centuries, the Pleiades would daily rise in the east, transit the heavens and sink in the west at daybreak, having marked the high point of the skies at an equal distance between the two. Here was a gift to skywatchers everywhere: an unshifting, central marker of the skies.[16] Little wonder either that the southern passageway of the Great Pyramid at Giza, as well as the Parthenon in Athens[17] are both aligned to the Pleiades, that in Arabic they are known as '*The* Asterism' or 'The Foundation Stone', or that their brightest star which we know as Alkyone was also known as Amba, the Mother, thereby bringing the fertility concept into the equation. The cultural continuity of Pleiad observation, myth-making and recording has been traced to pre-Vedic times in Europe and Asia, and found equally among Maoris, the Aborigines of Australia, and Chinese, Mayan and Aztec peoples, in all of whose traditions some remarkably consistent major features are apparent, including the presence of seven stars even though only six can be seen: "Seven are they in the songs of men, albeit only six are visible to the eye", reported Aratus, Greek astronomer of the third century BCE.[18] Many stories have been invented to explain the 'missing' Pleiad, but the most likely truth is that this constellation was important enough to be assimilated numerically to the other two great heptads, the Great Bear and Orion, who has three stars in his belt and four others defining the corners of his giant figure. Be that as may, the Greeks exhibited an exceptional attachment to the number seven, in their designation of the Seven Wonders of the World for example, the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus and the Seven Wise Men of a philosophical Pleiad (whose maxims were recorded over the door of Apollo's temple). The great Achaian warrior Achilleus was reputedly the seventh son of his parents, according to Callimachus.[19]

Is it possible that ancient civilisations searching for a visible, stable centre of the heavens, a true, visible centre separate from the polar centre, found what they sought somewhere in the form of the humble cluster of the Pleiades? We have spoken earlier of the sky centre where a 'nail' fastened the pole, mountain or tree to the sky; the same point could present as a 'hole'. Among the Yakut and other Altaic peoples in the Asian homeland of early shamanism there was a belief that in the centre of the constellation a hole in the vault of Heaven allowed an inrush of cold air from the far side.[20] A similar idea was embroidered with greater sophistication in India, where the same centre in the Pleiades has been identified as Vishnunabhi ('navel of Vishnu'), a place circumscribed by the Sun in its revolution and a hollow source of 'the universal magnetism'; for, it has been claimed, when the Sun reaches its closest approximation to Vishnunabhi the increase of magnetic influence on Earth brings about striking changes in man's universal consciousness.[21] In South America, the same conjunction of Sun and Pleiades, but with the zenith as their meeting point in May, was recorded in stone at Chichén Itzá in the Mayan classic period with the construction of the pyramid of Kukulcan. At this justifiably famous site, the shadow of a rattlesnake with 'Pleiades tail' (the markings on its *tzab*, or solar-faced 'rattle' which points to the zenith) is seen sixty days before the equinox at the time of Sun-Zenith alignment, 'snaking' its way dramatically down the pyramid steps as if it were alive. In the year 2012 of our era this event will coincide with a solar eclipse when the Moon will enter this already overloaded conjunction. In the view of John Major Jenkins, the construction of Kukulcan was predictive from the very outset of events due to occur in 2012 and intended to mark in calendrical fashion the visible approach of a new World Age when, in or around this date, we enter the 'Age of Aquarius'.[22]

Ithaka and the Pleiades

The major features of Pleiades myth we shall take one at a time, whilst considering their relevance to the characters and situations found on Odysseus' Ithaka. The first identifies the lead star of the Pleiades, Alkyone (or Alcyone) with a bird woman and goddess. The next concerns the pursuit of the Pleiades by the constellation of the hunter Orion. The last identifies the same stars with flood, death and disaster, to which is appended a Myth of Destruction and the end of an Age. But first it will be useful to see the role allocated to the Pleiades and their lead star in Greek tradition as it has been preserved to date.

The Asterism in Myth

It is commonly said that the Pleiades received their name from the Greek verb to sail, *pleion,* since their spring reappearance marked the beginning of safe navigation;[23] however *pleion* as 'plenty' also appears in the mythology. Others have proposed a connection with birds, *peleiadai,* which are pigeons or doves.[24] Goddesses are very often given an avian avatar of this kind. Homer makes a brief reference to the lead star Alkyone, a sea-bird, in the *Iliad* (9, 562) and Hesiod fills out the story in a poem 'The Marriage of Ceyx',[25] but most of what we know derives from Apollodorus (1. 7. 4), Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (11, 270-748), and scattered references in Plutarch's *Moralia*, their mythic genealogy preserving a cosmogonic tradition in which the *axis* ('Atlas') conjoins with the sea (or 'navel' thereof) to generate seven 'daughter' stars marking the apex of the Heaven, which seems most appropriate in view of his axial role in uniting the undersea world with the high point of the sky. Electra, Maia, Taygete, Alcyone, Celaeno, Asterope, and Merope are their names. All are exceedingly bright, but Alcyone / Alkyone is brightest of them all and fittest to serve as first among many. She is, I believe, our Penelope.

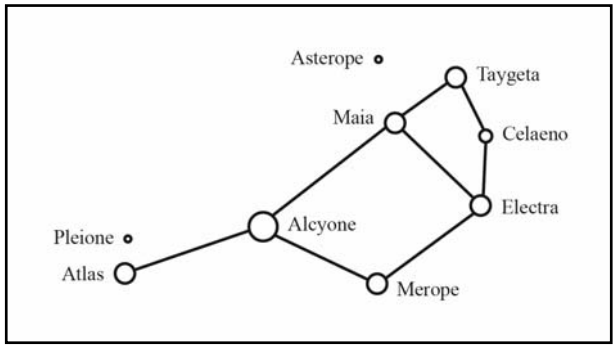

Figure XVI-18

The history of the Pleiades as seasonal markers is a great deal older than any surviving folklore or literature. They appear on a cave painting in the Palaeolithic Cave at Lascaux in France, painted on the shoulder of the Bull ('Taurus'), and are equally apparent as a cluster on an ancient seal from Mohenjo-Daro in India,[26] while the Indian *Nakshatra* system which uses lunar asterisms rather than Zodiac positions to register sky

movements had recognised the Pleiades as the junction star of the first Nakshatra from at least 1181 BCE, when they marked the vernal equinox. In India they are named Krittika and given a role as the seven wives of the seven male stars of the Big Dipper, the latter being *rishis* or great seers. The seventh star, the one hard to see, is married to Dhruva, the Pole Star, or governing *rishi*. This close relationship between Pleiades and the stars of the terrestrial pole underlines their importance and quasi-identity with polar qualities, such as the conceptual and mystic Centre as a creative impulse or central principle from which life evolves.[27]

Confirmation of this mystical aspect of the asterism can be found in the ancient records of animal sacrifice. The hide of a black bull (representing Taurus) would be used to cover the Mesopotamian sacred drum; and the bull himself should ideally, in the view of sacrificers, be marked on the forehead by the white mark of the Pleiades. Perhaps on account of the link between Pleiades and fertilising rainfall, the Indian horse of great and costly Vedic horse-sacrifice should also display the same sign. The priestly thinking on this issue may be that an inborn sign should mark the desired destination of the sacrificial animal, the particular divinities associated with that site, and a specific outcome. Whatever the case, it would seem likely that the Pleiades had some immense benefit to confer on those who sought out its favours; and since sacrifice is so often a ritual designed to promote fertility it may be that it is the Pleiades as 'senders of rain' which are being invoked.

Numbering in fact at least several hundred, only six stars are readily visible to the naked eye. They are identified and their predominant pattern marked in figure XVI-18**,** in which the form of yet another small 'dipper' can be imagined. It is as seven young men or women that the group is most usually known throughout the world, while the dancer who leads her band through the skies is generally identified with the brightest and largest of the group, Alkyone. The legends attaching to her, being particularly rich and relevant to our case, deserve greater scrutiny.

Alkyone

Her name is charmingly linked with the halcyon bird, otherwise known as the kingfisher, and a puzzling connection with a love story. A poet of the seventh century BCE, Alcman, wrote "Would that I were the ceryl bird who flies over the sea with his halcyon mate",[28] referring to the story of the love of Ceyx, a sea bird, and his wife Alkyone, the halcyon, who incurred the anger of Zeus for their impiety in naming themselves 'Zeus and Hera'. In his anger the great god had turned them into birds. Tradition

has it that after Ceyx was drowned at sea, Alkyone / the halcyon built a nest on the waves during the winter solstice and laid her eggs there, wailing for her lost mate. (This has distinct overtones of the 'floating island' and may relate to the passage of the Pleiades across the sky). Aristotle[29] provides the detail that the days of nest building are the seven days before the solstice and the seven days of egg-laying are those that follow; these are days when the winds sleep, to be known even now as the peaceful 'halcyon days' which give a brief respite from winter storms. When the halcyon-bird flies about the head of Jason and foretells the calming of the winds,[30] this 'bird goddess' reveals a prophetic voice (*ossa*) commonly attributed to birds as oracular beings. Athene appears in just such a role when having counselled her favourite to stand firm (like a true Achaian warrior) and urged him on by example, she takes the form of a swallow and sits on the house beam of Odysseus' palace to watch the progress of the battle (22, 224-240).

Because of Alkyone's embodiment as a bird, Gerald Gresseth[31] has interpreted her as a symbol of the Sun which plunges steeply into the waters just like the kingfisher. She certainly has some cosmic significance through her association with the quarter days and the stilling of winds, but I think we can do even better for Alkyone by stressing her role as marker (with her sisters) of the highest point in the skies close to the Pole Star, but an even truer marker of centrality than this star of the shifting pole. By virtue of a connection with this mystical centre, the halcyon would surely have the right to superior knowledge; she may certainly 'plunge' in a straight line in axial manner along the line established by her Titanic father, Atlas; and one with such celestial gifts may certainly have power over the winds. Her nest-building, egg-laying activities which are such a puzzling feature of the legend reveal themselves as tokens of annual renewal relevant to the solstice turn of the year, so that when (after the death of the mate and her nest-building, using the dead wood of the old year) she lays her eggs, the moment signifies that 'coming into being' universally associated with the turn of the year and the approaching renewal of life as the Sun begins its return journey from the dark days of winter solstice.

Ithaka / Alkyone as the brightest member of the Pleiades group is the solar-defined equivalent of polar Scheria, with its glorious queen Arete: the first marks the extremity of the solar axis of the Sun's ecliptic and the second gives a home to the extremity of the Earth's polar axis, at the Pole Star.

Alkyone / Penelope

This novel twinning of the wife of Odysseus with a distant star demands a detailed exploration of points of similarity between the Alkyone of myth and the narrative heroine. Upon such concordances or contra-indications depends much of the case for identifying Ithaka in the Ionian group of Greek islands with the starry cluster of the Pleiades.

To name the simplest first, both are female and mothers, and both, more potently, bewail the loss of a husband. Penelope is surrounded by her maids (and perhaps even her geese?) as surely as Alkyone enjoys the company of the other Pleiades; and Alkyone is the 'hen' to innumerable 'chickens', in the widespread name for the Pleiades in folklore. Both women are named for birds or have a bird-like role as the voice of truth and order. In Penelope's case, she is the guardian of the olive tree column where her bed is literally incorporated into the fabric as a 'nest in a tree'. In the absence of her husband she is responsible for its preservation and the stability of her household, which we have argued is ultimately the stability of the universal World Column. Her weaving and unweaving of the shroud of Laertes may be a metaphor for the waxing and waning phases of the Moon, and if so, the identification of Alkyone with the first lady of the Pleiades would be highly appropriate, for at a certain point the passage of the Moon through the box-like formation of this stellar group is capable of temporarily obscuring the four main stars from view.

Even more convincing are the reiterated appearances of Penelope (*penelops*, the water bird?) as she descends the stairs of the palace. Key words in her four separate appearances are 'radiance' and the 'shining' quality of her veil, which point to stellar light. Here is a perfect match between the bright veil which habitually covers the head of Penelope and the cloud nebula which frequently obscures the star Alkyone.

Even more powerful is Penelope's association with columns other than the olive tree rooted in her chamber, that is, the cosmic-axis pillars of the *domos*,[32] where like Arete she occupies the privileged position of the mistress of the house. This identification (achieved symbolically through an 'approximation' having much in common with the merger of divine beings with the leafy form of a tree) echoes not only Arete on Scheria but other pillar guardians such as Kalypso (another daughter of Atlas) and Hektor in his capacity of guardian of Troy, named by Pindar as its "pillar of strength".[33] The World Pillar of mythic geography connects the Earth to Heaven's centre, and it is the Pleiades which mark that true central point half way through their transit of the night sky.

There are even more indications that Homer's characterisation of Penelope was guided by the facts and mythic fiction attaching to the Pleiades.

Of Mountains, Rain, Tears and Thrones

The enormous capacity for weeping shown by the lady of Ithaka should be taken very seriously. The death-dealing Queen of the Laistrygonians was "as big as a mountain peak" (10, 112f.) but Penelope provides the benevolent, oppositional equivalent when her tears are compared with the melting snows which run off the mountains (she listens, she weeps, her body melts, 19, 204) with the difference that the melt waters from the hills are those that create fertility on Earth. Moreover, tear-shedding in the ancient world has been identified as a *ritual act* associated with "reinvigorating the Earth" or "reviving the dead" [34] a useful insight helpful in understanding not only the innate sense of Penelope's inordinate weeping but also her embodiment as Alkyone or the Pleiades in general, for the autumnal appearance of this constellation marks the onset of the rainy season in the northern hemisphere, bringing with it the certainty of fruitful late summer harvest. Both their winter solstice appearance overhead at night fall and their conjunction with the Sun at the spring equinox (in 2,000 BCE) reinforce the ancient link between Pleiades and life renewal, the latter readily accommodated to the spiritual rebirth of man.

All that we read of Pleiad traditions and astronomical facts confirms their role as markers of the true centre of the sky, the place where the *axis* of the ecliptic may leap from its socket and fall, to unleash the full and terrifying powers of the cosmos. Those with an interest in more recent folklore may be intrigued by the claims of Johann Heinrich Mädler (var. Maedler), once a celebrated astronomer and director at the observatory in Dorpat, Estonia, who published in 1846 his theory of the 'Central Sun', since disputed in these better-informed decades and no longer current. His view (as a man of science) was that the Pleiades are the central group of the entire system of the Milky Way, and Alkyone the individual star most likely to be the true 'central sun'.[35] He proposed Alkyone as the companion star to our Sun in a binary system, hence, another Sun. The value of his observation to this present enquiry is that even with the aid of telescopes the Pleiades seem to maintain their place at the centre of the sky, a fact which may have induced those early Jehovah's Witnesses happy to adopt the science of Mädler to identify the lead star Alkyone as the 'Throne of God'.

'Low and Away'

Returning to the lines of the *Odyssey* which set the previous chapter on its way to finding the home of Penelope and Odysseus, we are now in a better position to weigh up the directional indicators. The Pleiades, it has been said, are highly important to agriculture and travel because they are such accurate and unvarying markers of the season. So here is an answer to Athene's suggestion that "there are indeed many who know it". The Pleiades are visible from the whole of the northern hemisphere, which they transit from east to west at night, and this fact fully accords with the *Odyssey*'s description of Ithaka as lying towards "the dark" or "mist and darkness" (west, or celestial north, "up and away") as well as its opposition, "the east and sunshine" or "east and sunrise". East and west extremes, a *high* position at the zenith and *low* position as they fall below the horizon are all staging posts on the trajectory of this group. Once again, three-dimensional celestial geography is providing an answer to Homer's puzzling topography.

So, what of Ithaka as "low and away, last of all upon the water"? The asterism is seen as we have said from March to April, climbing the night skies from the east and reaching the zenith, then descending and sinking from view on the western horizon. The Pleiades are "last of all", on the 'cosmic water' when they stand at the heavens' high point, but equally so immediately before their first appearance in the east and later, falling away in the west at night, "toward the dark". Any observer still believing that the Sun travelled around the Earth would assume that like the Sun, the Pleiades passed under or behind the Earth to reappear in the east, at night, just as the Sun reappears by day. Finally, with such a long term of visibility and such an important role as marker stars, the Pleiades could not help but be as well known as Athene claims.

The Steadfast Column

One last observation: Odysseus feared that the *axis*-tree may have shifted in his absence, *but it did not*. It was Scheria that suffered the petrifaction of its flying ship which created a 'neighbouring island' and Scheria as Pole Star which should, and quite rightly did in all astronomical accuracy, experience dislocation from its *axis*. The Phaiakians may be thought poised to undertake yet another re-colonisation following the immobilisation of their ship. The Pleiades, on the other hand, do not deviate from their path. They mark the centre of the skies for every observer in the northern hemisphere for the greater part of the year and,

even more, measure the seasons by which man is able to keep his activities in tune with the great cosmic dance of the stars. Nevertheless it is reasonable in human terms that Odysseus should fear the same dislocation on his home island as that suffered by the North Pole Star.

Emboldened by these possibilities, we might risk finding a stellar territory for Odysseus himself.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE STARRY NEIGHBOURS OF ITHAKA

Neighbouring Orion

Part of the Greek tradition of the Pleiades[1] tells how Zeus turned the young women who were hunting with Artemis into stars to help them evade the pursuit of Orion, who was fully intent on an amorous encounter.[2] "To escape Orion's rude strength" appears in the *Works and Days* of Hesiod (617-621) to mark the time of raging winds which keep ships in harbour. Homer places Orion in prime position on the Shield of Achilleus (*Iliad* 18, 486-489) and adds in a later passage a description of Achilleus "of the swift feet" racing across the plain, as rapidly as the Dog Star, bright Sirius, which follows at the heels of the giant Orion (*Iliad* 22, 25-32). This giant bowman had himself been given a place in the skies after several adventures (including a rape) culminated in the sting of a giant scorpion, which killed him. Both man and scorpion were then placed at opposite ends of the sky by Zeus. Scorpio still 'pursues' Orion from the east as his human prey disappears in the west, but he never 'catches' him.

Greek sources have little to say about the relationship between the Pleiades and Orion, but the Hebrew Old Testament appears to associate Orion ('*kesil*') and the Pleiades ('*kimah*') in *Job* (38, 31) where '*kesil*' is described as a man bound or chained: "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?" There are difficulties of translation and the identifications are uncertain,[3] but the verse seems to confirm a relationship between the two constellations, and this in turn, may be confirmed by simple observation, for Orion does indeed move across the sky at the heels of the Pleiades, if not in pursuit at least attentively on the same path as the ladies who precede him through the night sky. If a line is drawn along the three stars in Orion's belt (lower to higher) it will be seen to point to the Pleiades. Thus bright Orion is helpful in finding the Pleiades, a bright but small cluster (figure XVII-19).

An intriguing footnote to the ancient importance of Orion has been offered by Alexander MacGillivray.[4] He writes that while Orion stands in head-on confrontation with Taurus (represented in part by the Pleiades and

Hyades), Perseus somersaults with arms extended over the back of the 'Bull' in his haste to rescue Andromeda. His suggestion is that bull-leaping scenes preserved in cult images recovered from the ruins of the Cretan palaces while possibly a true record of daring athletics performed in the great courts of Minoan Crete, also relate to a cosmic model. If the young Minoans did indeed prove their courage and strength in this manner, it could be that their feats were related to some initiatory activity of cosmic significance. The famous artefacts dubbed 'Horns of Consecration' by the archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans, which resemble nothing more than twin mountain peaks or the two gates of the horizon portrayed in Egyptian iconography, could also prove to be a cult object drawing upon the 'horns' of the constellation of Taurus imagined as a gate. For these and other reasons, including the wide use of *bucrania* in sacred imagery and the presence of mighty bull statues standing guard at the gates of Mesopotamian cities, as another does at the North Gate of Knossos, it is hypothesised here that the purpose of bull leaping was a preparation for the soul's passage through a 'door in the sky' and into the world of the gods. In this theory the door would lie between the horns of Taurus, close to the point where the Pleiades sit on the shoulder of the great bull. Perhaps they were even "the gates of polished horn" mentioned by Penelope as the source of true and better dreams (19, 560-569)?

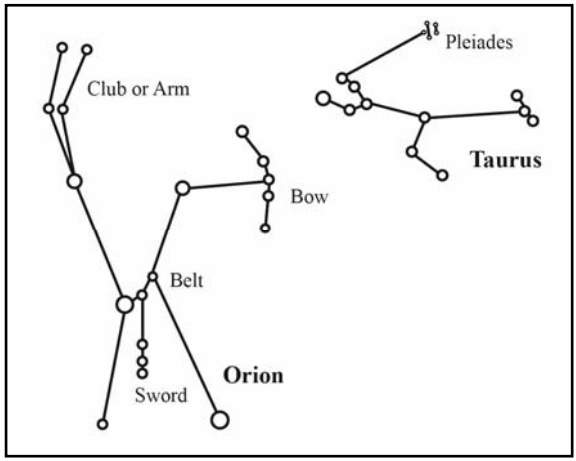

Figure XVII-19

The Pleiades have a further, destructive aspect as sinister agents of change, which may be the true source of Odysseus' fears for the safety of his olive-tree bed.

Flood, Death and Disaster: the Myth of Destruction

Alkyone, the weeping wife mourning her husband, harbinger of the winter rains, provides a favourable indicator of useful precipitation to come. But water can be an agent of destruction as well as an agent for good and this may be the cause of the malevolent nature attributed to the Pleiades in some cultures. Flood, we have noted, is one of the cataclysmic events associated with the shifting of the polar axis. Wherever the Pleiades are discussed their name is linked to overwhelming deluges: the flood ridden out by Noah, for example, or the drowning of Osiris by Seth (the evil one) and the scattering of his body parts which, for the Egyptians, were to become the Pleiades.

Flood is the major deluge event which introduces a new World Age, as the Babylonian creator-hero Marduk speaks of it. In the following quotation the bracketed interpretations are my own:

> "When I stood up from my sea [*precession, opening a gap in the sky*] and let the flood break in [*cosmic waters escape from the firmament*] then the judgement of Earth and Heaven [*loss of order, associated with wisdom*] went out of joint…[*due to precessional shift?*]
>
> The gods, which trembled, the stars of Heaven -
> their position changed, and I did not bring them back."[5]

After the Deluge, nothing returned to its original position.

Hamlet

The translation of Marduk's phrase "out of joint" may seem familiar. It recalls, accidentally one presumes - but who knows? the closing words of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* following the wholesale slaughter of family, friends and attendants in the palace of Elsinore: "The times are out of joint", he declares.[6] The startling truth of the matter is that *Hamlet* too draws upon the Myth of Precession via the European folklore of Amleth or Amlodhi which has provided De Santillana and von Dechend with a fruitful paradigm for the identification of universal precessional myths (in their jointly-authored book, *Hamlet's Mill,* 1977). The challenge of finding precessional detail in the Shakespearean play has been taken up more

recently by Piotr Sadowski (1987) and most useful it proves. Sadowski is sensitive to the role played by symbolism in the transmission of astronomical knowledge through the medium of myth, which functions in his opinion, associatively,[7] just as we have argued in this book. Examining the Hamlet myth in the context of the prophetic songs of the Norse *Edda* concerning the end of the world, Sadowski has noted common themes of an uprooting of the cosmic *axis* in an age of degeneration, in which the destruction of (or in) a palace or temple serves as a metaphor for the destruction of the wider universe. Hamlet configures as the culture hero or legitimate ruler who is destined to die in the course of an act of purification essential to the delivery of the 'Old Age' from its evil (represented by a false, murderous and incestuous king and an adulterous, widowed queen) and the ushering in of its replacement. (The *Odyssey*, of course, casts the suitors as the evil element and comes close to implying an adulterous role for Penelope). Hamlet fills the same mythic role as Samson, who pulled down the pillars of the house of the Philistines where he was held captive and who was fated to die in the process, just as Shakespeare's hero of Elsinore, his family and companions must all meet a tragic end.

Here, then, is a well-defined ancient mythologem: the destruction of the palace in its cosmic setting is a variant of the Deluge myth in so far as both represent the Precession of the Equinoxes. Odysseus has his own 'palace destruction' in which under the guidance of Zeus he purges the hall of its suitors and those faithless servants who had been subverting its right order. Hamlet's burning of the palace of Elsinore with all of those who dwelt there is an accurate precessional detail, for fire is a major climactic element associated with cosmic disaster. Odysseus carries out a similar 'cleansing by fire' and fumigation of the hall following the mass execution of the suitors, commanding Eurykleia with these words:

> "Bring me brimstone, old dame, the cure of evils, and bring me
> fire, so I can sulphur the hall…" (22,480f.)

and again, when Eurykleia is fussing about him, "Before all this, let me have fire in my palace." (491). The dead transgressors, reports the old servant, are lying together by the doors of the courtyard, while Odysseus himself, with his own hands is purging the palace:

> "he is burning a great fire, and cleaning the beautiful
> house with brimstone." (23,50f.)

With these several repetitions Homer leaves his audience in no doubt as to the importance of the cleansing fire.

As well as being a symptom of precessional disorder, fire belongs to the polar axis in the latter's configuration as a churning fire stick or fire-sparking metal axle, or the reed carrying the first spark of fire in the myth of Prometheus. Here in the battle in the hall, we witness not merely the end of a cruel regime offensive to the gods, but the dawn of a New Age in which Odysseus plays the dual part of destroyer of evil and re-creator of original order; he has even presented himself as 'Fire' itself, as 'Aithon', in one of his lying tales (19, 183; cf. 18, 343f.) In such a role, he reveals his affinity with Hamlet and Samson, as well as with Marduk and the 'Japanese Samson', Susanowo, another brave and impetuous male and 'Puller-down-of-houses', who has an antipodean counterpart in a Maori hero Whakatau, who demolished his own house with ropes, and even Zipacna the Mayan who performed a similarly prodigious feat.[8] And who can forget Odysseus as the "sacker of cities"?

Apparently, there exists a stellar model for these builders and destroyers and De Santillana and Von Dechend believe they have found one such in Orion. A particular clue is provided by their common possession of a mighty but unconventional weapon, a jawbone or a thigh bone, used in the case of Marduk in the manner of a boomerang to destroy his enemies. His 'bone' was that asterism identified by the Babylonians as the Hyades, seven stars marking the jaw of the great Bull in the skies and associated with water ('the rainy Hyades') but it might equally be the Egyptian symbol of the North Polar axis, the 'thigh of the Bull'. Biblical Samson's version of the Taurus jawbone is the jawbone of an ass, which spurted water like a fountain; hence the Hyades are once again part of the formula of destruction (*Judges* 15, 19). Odysseus of course was a master of the bow, an unusual weapon in the Homeric context but so are jawbones and thighs of bulls in other myths.

Another attribute of these heroes thought to be modelled on Orion is a net used as a snare, and here we remember Odysseus' stringing up of the treacherous maidservants by a rope across the pillars, like little birds caught in a trap, as well as the tale of Ares and Aphrodite (8, 266-366) sung for Odysseus on the island of Scheria, which was a salutary but amusing tale of revenge involving the entanglement of the adulterers in a net. For the authors of *Hamlet's Mill*, this is an allegory of the conjunction of Mars and Venus taking place in the vicinity of the Pleiades,[9] which are presumably the net in question (or, as suggested earlier, the misty veil of Alkyone / Penelope). Hamlet in the early version of the legend by Saxo Grammaticus threw a knotted carpet net prepared by his mother over the

drunken revellers in his hall before burning it down, and Clytemnestra threw a net over the king in his bath. In the Babylonian Creation myth, a net is one of the storm weapons used by Marduk to overcome the destructive forces of Tiamat. The Hawaiian hero of legend, Kaulu, went to the heavens for his nets which he was given as the stars of the Pleiades and Hyades; and having tangled up 'the evil one', he burnt down her house.

An even closer cultural parallel to Odysseus as Orion can be found in the ancient *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Gilgamesh as Orion

The model for all these fighting, vengeful, fire-setting and supernatural heroes is probably starry Orion, the great hunter in the sky who pursues the Pleiades and their companions, the Hyades. Like Odysseus, Orion is a master of the bow, in his case a bow of cosmic proportions. The bow which is kept in Penelope's locked storeroom is a narrative necessity, first to the test of strength, then to the destruction of the suitors and finally to the assertion of the hero's identity: it cannot be regarded as an incidental possession, for his weaponry is crucial to the heroic persona of the master of Ithaka, but the importance and gravity of Penelope's entry into the storeroom should remind us that this bow holds supra-normal significance.

A *Gilgamesh* parallel is particularly attractive, given the many similarities between the two epics and the great antiquity of both. In tablet IX of the *Gilgamesh Epic* (lines 13-18)[10] the hero is portrayed as carrying an axe in his hand and a dagger in his belt, and said to fall like an arrow on the lions who threaten him. He too, it appears, carries about him the substance of Orion, who rides the sky at night just so armoured, his belt particularly bright, his weapons held aloft. His constellation is visible in both northern and southern hemispheres as he dips and dives around the circumference of the horizon, never lost from view. So here is another reason to connect Odysseus and Orion – both 'bowmen', they both pursue a visibly circular course which is conceivably the path which shapes the first, circular phase of the Adventures.

Of further interest is the position of the celestial hunter below Taurus the Bull, both, as we have said, appearing to be confronted and ready for battle, the head of the Bull lowered and the weapons of the hunter raised. One recent interpretation of the encounter of Gilgamesh with the Bull of Heaven[11] has proposed that this too should be read as a precessional myth, i.e. the ending of the Age of Taurus and the inception of the Age of Aries the Ram. (Gilgamesh, as the king of Uruk, was followed by Lugalbanda, the first of the 'Shepherd Kings'). Tablet V relates how Gilgamesh and his

friend Enkidu seek out the ogre Humbaba who resides in the Forest of Cedar and how they destroy him with a blow to the neck. The ogre's death is likened to the felling of "a lofty cedar, whose top thrust up to the sky" (294f.) and this great timber they carry away on a raft, to be an object of amazement to all.[12] Another account of the slaying of the Bull given in tablet VI adds the detail that the death blow strikes "between the yoke of the horns and the slaughter spot" (140) i.e. the neck of the Bull. (When Ishtar laments the death of the animal, Enkidu hurls the "haunch" (155) of the Bull in her direction. This can be no other than the symbol of the North Pole Star, described in Egyptian and Near Eastern mythology as the thigh of the bull). One possible conclusion to be drawn from these particulars is that Humbaba the guardian of the great cedar tree is at home in the Pleiades which sit on the shoulder ("the slaughter spot") of the Bull. And the 'stabbing of the Bull in the shoulder' is recognisably also a leading motif in the Mithraic Tauroctony, where it may refer to a precessional event.[13]

The long history of Orion in legend and astronomy is so complex that it demands a dedicated study of its own. All that the present work has space to achieve is to indicate an accumulation of cross-referencing detail which reaches, in our view, beyond coincidence. The basic elements of the Gilgamesh tale and similar are these: Taurus in association with the Pleiades, the felling of a great tree, its transport across the sea, the precessional shift, and Orion-Odysseus-Gilgamesh as the heroes who 'attack' an enemy force in token of advancement or preservation of a cosmic *status quo,* which may be associated with averting precessional disaster.

In view of all these connections Odysseus may be considered as a prototypical Orion, forever seeking out his Penelope in the Pleiades, and while his stringing of the bow becomes a cosmic act achievable only by a supernaturally powerful agent, his subsequent firing of the arrow through twelve axes set up in careful alignment can be no other than the 'stringing together' of the twelve houses of the Zodiac.[14] Is this perhaps an 'act of binding' intended to stabilise the houses in their ideal position?

The Festival of Apollo

Ithaka is to be the scene of more than one cosmic act. Lest we should overlook the importance of his hero's island, the poet has signalled not only its position but also the *point in time* when the destructive forces were defeated in the hall. While Penelope has sat in her chamber weaving and unweaving, like the Moon, her husband has followed the solar circuit and visited the most significant points on that circle: the solstice and equinoctial points, the zenith and nadir, the polar centre, and has finally

come to rest at the centre of the Sun's ecliptic path. In all important respects, he *is* the Sun, or a solar marker. So finally, Sun is to be reunited with Moon, an event which in astronomical reality occurs every twenty years, or rather on the last day of the nineteenth year (and the first of the twentieth year, in Greek thinking). Sun in the person of Odysseus came back to Ithaka at dawn, or a fraction before it, on the very cusp of day (13, 93ff.), thus at the moment when night meets day. This nineteen year period is known as the Metonic year, when the competing calendars, lunar (354 days) and solar (365 days and a few hours) are briefly reconciled.

Some years ago the classicist Gilbert Murray[15] pointed out the importance of this event to the unravelling of the *Odyssey*'*s* chronological framework, in particular the return of Odysseus at the time of the new Moon, at its "waning…or at its onset" (19, 307 = 14, 162) when a public festival was to be celebrated in honour of "the god" (20, 156; 21, 258). Apollo is generally identified as the god to be honoured with a holy feast on this day, on the strength of book 20, 276ff. In truth, bow-stringing activities in the hall and the death of the suitors pierced by deadly arrows do indeed encourage the association of Apollo, the one "who shoots from afar", with this particular feast. All the known festivals of Apollo were held on the seventh day of the month, in the first lunar quarter; conspicuous by its absence however is any statement to the effect that the Apolline festival marked the start of the New Year. We must deal with this issue, since any 'new year' has the potential to mark a new Age.

The Greek calendar may have been far from standardised in the eighth century, since later recorded custom varied the celebration of the New Year from summer solstice (Athens, Delphi), to autumn equinox (Miletos), winter solstice (Boetia, Delos) and vernal equinox (Chios);[16] but all used the first new Moon as the point of the year's beginning, due to the likely use of a lunar-solar combined calendar. This has not prevented various commentators such as Wilamowitz[17] from identifying this New Moon in the *Odyssey* with the New Year. Some might argue that the new year could begin with the welcome return of the Sun from its lowest point (winter solstice) but Norman Austin[18] points to the several tokens of spring leading up to the battle in the hall, such as the song of the nightingale (19, 518ff.), the swallow-song of the bow of Odysseus (21, 411); and the suitors stampeding like cattle when goaded by the gadfly in spring, perhaps at or soon after the equinox, "when the days grow longer" (22, 299ff.). On balance, some variety of New Year would seem a possible factor in the celebrations, or at least a festival acknowledging the spring time resurgence in April around the time of the equinox, as representative of yearly renewal.

Omen and Eclipse

The precise date of the festival is not without significance to a cosmic interpretation of the *Odyssey*. It is a greatly debated topic in Homeric studies, but on balance it would seem likely that the seer Theoklymenos did indeed predict a total solar eclipse for the day of the festival and the day of the battle in the hall. As it is told in book 20, the suitors sat down to their midday meal soon after Telemachus had stated a willingness to allow his mother to remarry; Athene immediately 'stirred up' uncontrollable laughter in the suitors, whose jaws moved as if controlled by an external agency. Truth be told, it is laughter more like weeping, for tears fall and meat is seen as a mess of blood (20, 338-349). To confound the evil omens and their prophecy of death even further, Theoklymenos remarks upon the change of light which casts a dark pall over these same men, while blood appears to run from the walls and pillars (351-354). Although this is presented as prophecy, not an event, the fact that the vision places their death as imminent cannot be doubted, for the forecourt fills with ghosts like those same spirits which Hermes is soon to lead down to the "Underworld (24, 1-10): "they flock down to the underworld and darkness" (20, 356).

Then comes the critical lines on which the eclipse theory rests: "The sun / has perished out of the sky, and a foul mist has come over" (356f.) and "everything here is darkness" (362).

This was sufficient proof for Heraclitus[19] and Plutarch[20] to maintain that an eclipse event marked the culmination of the *Odyssey*. A timely revision in our own century has happily confirmed the accuracy of the old theory. In 2007 two astronomers published an updated review of evidence previously published by Schoch (1926) and Neugebaur (1929) to the effect that an eclipse occurred on April 16, 1178, hence in spring, close to the vernal equinox, in the region of the Ionian Islands. This idea has to date been given little credence by Homerists, many of whom are equally dismissive of the import of Theoklymenos' prediction of eclipse, but in the present decade these two men of science, Constantino Baikouzis and Marcelo Magnasco (2007) have had the advantage of computer software to project their data backwards beyond the first recorded Greek eclipse, to confirm a date of April 1178 for a similar event; what is more, they claim a time of 12.02 pm for a spectacular eclipse which would indeed have cast a sickly light over the condemned men sitting down to dine, when an unearthly *midday* darkness lay over the island.

They claim additional textual support in Odysseus' observation of the Pleiades, "late setting" Boötes and the Bear on departure from Kalypso's Ogygia. In the Spring season the first two are only seen at the same time

(with the always-visible Bear) on days between 17 February and 3 April, which would make an Ithakan early April festival of Apollo a narrative possibility.

The Metonic cycle of nineteen years highlighted by Gilbert Murray is in fact an eclipse cycle, for the gravitational pull of the Sun on the Moon causes the latter's nodes to precess slowly backwards, completing the circle in approximately 18.6 years. These lunar nodes have been considered here in earlier pages during discussion of the homes of Circe and Kalypso. As the crossing points of lunar and ecliptic planes, it will be recalled, they are the only places where eclipses can and will occur if the respective planes of solar and lunar orbits should coincide within fifteen to seventeen degrees of a node. An eclipse which obscured the light of the Sun has also been named here as causing Odysseus' loss of direction on Aiaia, where he failed to identify east or west. So Circe's home was, at some time, on or near a lunar node. So too is Ithaka, if the testimony of Theoklymenos is to be believed. These 'nodal' correspondences may be at the root of carefully engineered resemblances between the weavers Penelope, Circe and Kalypso, and the omphalic centres of their respective islands, not forgetting the power-charged reunion of Odysseus in his solar aspect with Penelope the rainy, lunar force, on the central island of the Pleiades.

Before venturing into such matters, we shall revise what Baikouzis and Magnasco can tell us about the eclipse of 1178 BCE. By all accounts it was truly spectacular, and surely an apt subject for fireside tales for centuries to follow and an assured place in the oral history of the people. On that day in April a rare total solar eclipse (only possible every 370 years) could be seen from the Ionian Islands, fifteen days after the equinox (which occurred on April 1st. in that year), hence on April 16th, according to the proposed figures. The five planets which can be seen with the naked eye were simultaneously visible on a 90 degree arc of the ecliptic, which extended from north-east to south-west. The Moon totally and suddenly obscured the Sun. Most dramatically, the occluded Sun was 'crowned' by the Pleiades, stars not normally seen by day but now magically revealed against the rare noon-time darkness. It is in the nature of such ecliptic phenomena that they are location-specific, that is, dependent upon the viewpoint of the observer, so one can be sure that the entirety of this vision was not shared by people further afield. It must have been viewed as a particular revelation, almost a targeted 'sign' to the people of Ithaka and neighbouring islands that their territory shared an uncommon 'closeness to the gods'.

Why Ithaka?

It hardly seems necessary to ask now why Ithaka was chosen as the key island among many. There are however more supporting details worth mentioning, including the relationship of the island with neighbouring territories.

Ithaka is the location of the central, unifying action of the poem, accompanied by a few lesser named islands which play little part in the action (Doulichion, Same, Zakynthos). Jean Richer sees an etymological link of 'Ithaka' with Hebrew *tōk*, 'in the middle of', or *tāwik*, 'the middle' and notes that the northern end of Ithaka lies on the latitude of Delphi, the navel centre of Greece,[21] hence by association emphatically 'of the middle' on the earthly plane, as it is on the celestial backdrop. Since the island is relatively small and not particularly distinguished in terms of productivity as well as lying in a ragged cluster whose true middle would scarcely be a matter of political importance, perhaps the centrality in question is something substantially more than terrestrial. In fact, it is to be wondered whether attempts to identify 'the Ithaka of Odysseus' are not putting the proverbial cart before the horse by prioritising the literary and archaeological evidence at the expense of a wider mythic context. The latter would be infinitely older and more subtle, yet for that reason, typically elusive. Were the Ionian Islands possibly given a 'stellar' connection even before Homer immortalised them as the home of his hero? Today Ithaka and six other islands which include Cephalonia, Corfu and Kethyra as well as the three named by the poet are commonly known as *(H) Eptanesa*, the Group of Seven. It has not been possible to determine how early the term came into use; it could well be a matter of a later political grouping under the auspices of a later incoming occupier, but other possibilities cannot be discounted.

Here, though, is an astounding alternative: is the dipper-like disposition of these seven Ionian Islands sufficiently strong to suggest a resemblance to the formation of the dipper-like Pleiades to bring about an idealised bond in the imagination of the people, a kind of cosmic, interplanetary 'town twinning'? If so, it would be totally in keeping with universal tradition, such as witnessed in the Greek sphere with the identification of Delos with the Hyperborean kingdom beyond the north wind discussed in our third chapter, or with the recreation of a 'polar city' at ancient Olympos, or for that matter the plain of Troy as a location for the playing out of the Myth of Destruction. Everywhere and since the early time of evolved consciousness, man has searched for such parities of form and function ('on Earth, as in Heaven') to help him identify potentially

sacred places on the terrestrial plane where communication with divinity might be most successfully established. Archaeology has proved that if such a place could not be found, man would set about creating his own *simulacra* of celestial forms or adapting existing features to clarify and reinforce the association. To this deep need of connection we owe the man-made Medicine Wheels, as well as the great calendrical temples and the Serpent Mounds of America. In Britain, the creation of Stonehenge as a solar model and the shaping of Silbury Hill (for reasons not currently clear but surely compulsive) involved a vast and laborious investment in time and manpower. All of these and many more are matched by the diligence of architects of temple alignments seen in buildings throughout the world. In such a climate of thought, an incidental and serendipitous likeness between a cluster of islands and a cluster of stars would surely not be overlooked. We cannot know how effective the early navigators were in surveying their own territory and perhaps it is ultimately not of any great importance, for a general sense that 'our islands look like the Pleiades' would be sufficient to excite: it would be an example of wishful thinking achieving a positive result.

And the astounding eclipse seen in April 1178 BCE would confirm the association.

Pleiades, Ithaka, Trees and Whirlpools

As one watches the Pleiades set in the west in the northern hemisphere, for some the group resembles a felled tree lying on its side. Others see a Tau cross in the disposition of the Pleiades which is entirely suited to this 'Taurean' constellation, and the imaginative may find a similar formation in the seven islands of the Ionian group. Most remarkable of all are the memories preserved by indigenous peoples and sometimes catalogued as mere eccentricities of myth. By giving them a place in the wider context of universal tradition an astonishing conformity emerges, and one which must have been based on astronomical observation. In South-east Asia the people of Borneo preserved a tradition of a 'whirlpool island' where there grew a tree reaching up to heaven. By climbing this tree, a man could bring back fertile seeds *from the Pleiades*. Here in another time and place is the Charybdian island of Homer, with its fig tree by the whirlpool, the very tree climbed by Odysseus at the end of his solar adventures: it was to lead him from Kalypso's island to his own home in the Pleiades and his own 'life-giving' tree. It is exceedingly doubtful that the legend or its prototype could have reached this distant spot from anything other than a very ancient Indo-European source. What is more, two other versions of

the mythologem *tree* + *whirlpool* + *island* which are similarly allied with a cosmic centre and clear precessional implications of an uprooting of the said tree, have been recorded as far from Asia as the Polynesian islands and South America.[22] In many of these tales, it is an archer or bowman much like Odysseus who stirs up the waters.

Having brought Odysseus home to the centre of the skies as well as to the centre of his own domestic world, we must now give thought to the adjustments to be made by the man and his family and the poet's true intention in bringing about the homecoming.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ITHAKA AND INTEGRATION

In a footnote to his analysis of a heroic solar journey, Norman Austin captured the unifying, universalising spirit of the *Odyssey* by calling particular attention to the same two solstice paths of decline and ascent which have formed the lynch pin of our own analysis.[1] We are perhaps now ready to consider the most astounding idea of all, the striving to achieve essential unity of man and cosmos, even to enter into harmony with the cosmos. A wavelength shared by a 'microcosm' (man) and the 'macrocosm' (Sun, or solar system) designates the shared identity of the 'One and the Many' which has further underpinned this book's search for the true course and meaning of the Adventures. There are profound implications to this philosophy which the poet, as always, clothes in the entertaining language of myth.

When Odysseus returned to his island he delayed for some time his moment of self-revelation until Penelope had finally forced the secret from him. Since by that stage others already knew that the 'father' and the 'master' of Ithaka had reclaimed his place in the *oikos*, that his enemies were soon to be dead and that the cleansing of the palace had already begun, this long delay in declaring himself to Penelope has presented a problem for Homerists. One explanation which may go some way towards clarifying the poet's intentions draws upon those ritual and initiatory processes which constitute stages of the hero-journey, whether it is a shamanic voyage, an epic adventure, or a cycle of psychic maturation. When he departed for the Trojan War Odysseus left behind (most reluctantly) all that was loved and familiar to him. His return was further blighted by disasters at sea which propelled him into a second life-stage characterised by pain and loneliness, which we have categorised as his transformative voyage. The relatively youthful Odysseus who rejoiced in the nurturing hills and shores of Ithaka entered into full maturity at this time in the course of his harsh encounters with grotesque monsters and devouring seas. There were many thresholds to be crossed and just as many contrary roads to be chosen, but the achievement of his *nostos* (in terms of his return to Ithaka) has proved the success of his endeavours to date. The final threshold involves entry into the fulfilment of Self, which

in life terms would probably be named maturity, but in respect of soul-evolution (or the development of the *anima*) this phase would be more appropriately termed a stage of wisdom commensurate with enlightenment. It is wisdom that Penelope finally represents, and the resolution of Odysseus' life crisis involves the fulfilment of his relationship with her and his surviving family. In other words, *nostos* involves not merely reunion but total *integration* with all that Ithaka stands for, among which are social and moral integrity as reflections of a greater cosmic order in which a centre meets and fuses with Centre. This stage, stretching over the final twelve books, must draw upon the lessons learnt on the outer voyage to complete the inner journey into Self-hood, and such a complex process demands as much time and attention from the poet and his audience as that given to the more violent and dramatic episodes of the first twelve.

At the happy moment when Odysseus rediscovers the child he left behind (Telemachos, now a man worthy of his father and one who has already begun his own life-journey amidst challenging threats from the suitors, and voyages afar) the returning hero confronts his own younger self. They fight side by side to overcome the threats to Ithaka's stability, the son scarcely less valiant than the father, and together they triumph. But at this stage Odysseus is still, to all but a few, the nameless beggar clad in rags and dependent on the charity of the suitors for scraps of food he must beg from their table. "Old man of many sorrows", the swineherd Eumaios dubs him (14, 386) as they sit together in the swineherd's crude hut which is a very model of cosmic order. In the seeming digression that follows the initial encounter of Odysseus and Eumaios much ironic play is made on the theme of divestiture, or clothing / unclothing, in the first instance via the tale of the mantle his master tries to coax from the servant, and the same disguised master's tale of the red mantle won by trickery for him, the speaker, by 'Odysseus', the wily deceiver of another Achaian during the Trojan war (14, 457-506). In this fourteenth book, early in the second phase of the work, the poet is laying down the foundations of a final extended metaphor in which clothing (its magnificence, its vileness, or its absence, nakedness) acts as a symbolic expression of the state of a man's personal evolution. Already the audience has heard of the divestiture of Odysseus on the approach to Scheria, when his remaining garment ('the veil of Ino') was cast aside by the sea-battered mariner in the first of many metaphors of naked rebirth. That sequence began the episode immediately prior to the return to Ithaka and the hero's adoption of the beggar's clothing, a debasing condition which effectively marked Odysseus as a 'non-person' in the first stage of return to his own household. A

ceremonial stripping, bathing, perfuming and re-clothing into a new 'state of being' (23, 153-164) in which the old housekeeper Euronyme performs the task earlier accomplished by young Nausikaa (confronting and merging age with youth, a *leitmotif* of the final episodes) and her maidens on the shore of her central omphalic island, signals Odysseus' moment of transition from scorned beggar to reinstated master. The inference of this domestic ritual in which Athene works her divine magic to elevate simple 'cleansing' to an act of craftsmanship worthy of Hephaistos ("art complete...grace on every work he finishes;" 161) is that the returning traveller has undergone yet another form of rebirth, surely this time the final transition. The transformation wrought upon him in his own home by Athene is equally as magnificent as the change on the beach of Scheria, and the poet employs the same formulaic block of lines in his description of the separate bathings (6, 229-235 = 23, 156-162). The parallel is further reinforced by Odysseus' requirement that all remaining members of the household should also bathe and dress (the women, "fair-girdled", 147, adding their "finery", 143) before setting about a round of dancing and music-making to give the impression that a wedding is taking place (133-136). The memory of the clean clothes prepared by Nausikaa, possibly for her own wedding, and the elaborate dance of her contemporaries, cannot be far from the memory of the audience at this point. Moreover, if Odysseus never married Nausikaa it was not for lack of willingness on her part; his return to Penelope does not require re-marriage but will be, after twenty years' absence, to all effects and purposes a reiteration of the first time. Penelope even reflects 'the silence of Arete' when she first enters the presence of her seated husband (23, 93) and considers her course of action, just as the queen of Scheria silently contemplated the visitor kneeling at her feet, while the holding back of the dawn which was Athene's gift enabling the reunited pair to prolong their lovemaking picks up once again the motif of a 'suspension of time'.

The One, the Two and the Many

Androgyny, the bi-sexual condition expressed in a ritual context such as the sacred marriage, can cast light on the profundity of the hero's completion of his voyage. The total and harmonious union of man and woman is an ancient myth of western and eastern provenance well-founded in ancient cosmologies, but also in the cosmogonies which describe the unfolding act of Creation, from the One to the Many. Egypt had some ancient bisexual gods, as did Iran, Scandinavia and China; Greece is no exception. Bisexuality of this order is not a matter of choice,

but infers the male and female united as one dual being. In addition, countless 'divine couples' are preserved in the mythology of all the nations as a similar expression of primeval completeness. Unity must necessarily be androgynous because the Origin must contain all potentiality, especially those of gender, if it is to unfold into the many forms of life which rely on sexual reproduction; so it follows that the gods and goddesses who relate most intimately to the source must also be bi-sexual divinities, even if they reveal their male and female characteristics quite distinctly.[2] For the western scholar, the most familiar argument for the dual condition is that uttered by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium,* where the discovery of one's other self is presented as a return to an earlier condition of moral and spiritual perfection; but Judaic scripture preserves the same idea in *Genesis* (1, 27) where it is recorded that God created man in his own image. That image expresses itself in the coming-into-being of male *and* female, first Adam, then Eve, but Eve was famously drawn from the body of Adam (2, 21f.) All Gnostic doctrines whether ancient or modern aim for personal transcendence via a fusion of opposites including those of gender.

For Mircea Eliade the myth of androgyny[3] provides a paradigm for ceremonies directed towards a return to the original condition, as a perfect expression of humanity. Man, he says, needs periodical cancellation of his differentiated condition in order to recover what has been lost to him. Through love of another, man commonly succeeds in effacing his 'self' and the egotistical needs of that self; it is in the physical and emotional fusion of body and mind that he comes closest to achieving that high ideal. That is not to say that the ideal necessarily exists in his mind as an abstraction, but it remains true that humble realities such as the closeness of man and wife are natural pleasures which echo and reinforce cosmic order by the provision of a stable, loving and 'self-less' relationship.

All details which draw Ithaka into close association with the timeless and fertile island of Arete and Alkinoös have the effect of underscoring Ithaka's ideal and near-paradisal condition, despite its ruggedness and infertility, whilst also pointing to the ideal marriage shared by Odysseus and Penelope mirroring the perfect union of the king and queen of Scheria (and which the hero could also have enjoyed, by marriage to Nausikaa). An alternative course of action (to re-union, re-marriage) would involve the hero sinking into that stage of negative decrepitude displayed by the mournful Laertes, who exemplifies a third and final stage of human life, alone, in his case, since unlike Odysseus whom he complements in many ways, he has no wife to make his life complete. The negative values represented in the portrait of Laertes will, when decoded, illustrate the

positive function executed (again, by analogy and symbol) in the character of his heroic son.

Grandfather, Father, and Son: the Old made New

Laertes has renounced palace life in favour of the fields; he wears rags, not fine linens, and rich bed coverlets have been exchanged for the wintry ashes of the fire, or autumn leaf-fall. The shift is from social order to natural order, from privileged 'insider' to self-exiled 'outsider', and from social elevation to descent and degradation. In his sorrow and isolation a grieving Laertes has literally lost his place in the process of losing himself. His situation reflects and inverts, as if in a mirror, the condition of the kingdom prior to the start of the integrative process which will draw together and bond (as one) man and wife, father and son, master and servant, in a newly harmonised wholeness, a 'One' on the model of the principial One. Until the moment when he will be reclaimed by Odysseus and drawn back to the family hearth, Laertes stands for the old *dis*-order, the destructive reign of the godless suitors, while in terms of solar and seasonal values, he is the dying of the day, the autumnal season of fall and disintegration: 'return to the soil', the archetypal dying god of vegetation, exemplified in the father-son legends of Dumuzi-Tammuz, Osiris, Isis, and Horus. Not for him the bed of leaves cradling and nurturing a "seed of fire" which gave comfort to his shipwrecked son on Scheria, but drifting leaves on the open ground, or dirt next to the fire, among dead embers (11, 190-195). Laertes emerges from these compelling details as a representative of the dying year which is shortly to be renewed by the son who has lately been 'reborn' at the New Year festival of Apollo, the day when he routed the old reign of misrule.

When Odysseus at last goes to meet Laertes he finds him, to his sorrow, working in the orderly vineyard but dressed in foul and squalid clothes which are base and unworthy, his clothing, like Odysseus' own former rags, fails to reflect his inner nobility. Laertes' clothes express not only his rank but also his current state of mind. In the 'testing' of the old man which follows, Laertes is wrenched out of his self-imposed disguise by the cruel mockery of Odysseus, who feigns having seen, then lost, the son Laertes so longs to see. At this point separate mirrors are beginning to give back a pattern reflecting into infinity: the son sees the father who is seeing the son who sees the father but pretends to have seen the son… The generations merge as effortlessly and timelessly as roles, genders and family relations have been crossed and interwoven in the great Homeric similes.

After the 'testing of Laertes', a parallel to the testing of Odysseus by Penelope, an abrupt but happy transition is made by the hero's father from the beggarly state (so similar to the beggarliness formerly displayed by Odysseus) which returns Laertes to the correct status of royal person. The scar which Odysseus discloses to his father as proof of identity is heralded as a *sema*, an "unmistakeable sign" (24, 327-335; 329) and at this point the transition of Laertes from beggarly old man to respected aristocrat is completed. He finally recognises and interprets the sign: *he remembers, he knows*. An outward appearance that reflects his inner joy is finally his. Laertes is bathed and he too receives a handsome mantle (367) which is placed upon his shoulders by the serving maid; and by the magical intervention of Athene he too is reclothed with his former beauty and stature (365-382). Almost, if only in his dreams, he is the long-ago warrior of his youth who could have fought off the suitors, as did his son (376-382), hence a kindly Athene allows him the first cast of a spear in a re-run of the battle in the hall when the men of three generations, Telemachus, Odysseus and Laertes unite to confront and defeat the suitors' relatives who are intent on revenging their loss (515; 412-437). To the re-mantling, the bathing, the transformation to god-like beauty as experiences shared by Laertes and Odysseus are now added a final masterstroke, in which the battle is fought again by a triumvirate of generations. And once again, in action led by the returning master, which makes a man of the dotard and a man of the boy, Time (represented by three now indistinguishable generations) is condensed into a cycle of recurring events which reiterate the overlapping, spiralling circle of the seasonal Sun and quite possibly, the recurrence of World Ages. Another result of the countless comparisons and the narrative accommodations of clothing, character and event, is the sense that all players dance to the same cosmic melody, that one reality shapes forms in space, movements in time and events in the lives of men, all being multiple reflections of a single macro-phenomenon.

Yet for all the momentous gravity of the message imparted by the events on Ithaka and given perspective by virtue of their similarity to events on Scheria, the episode is just as firmly rooted in the daily life and concerns of the common man as the pastoral and urban scenes on the cosmic Shield of Achilleus. The orchard of Laertes, it must be said, is as perfect as the orchard of Alkinoös which it evokes, with this difference, that Laertes' fifty vines bear appropriately *in season, "*whenever the seasons / of Zeus came down from the sky upon them" (24, 338-344). Despite the many parallels, Ithaka is no timeless Elysium, nor is it a divine Olympos; it is based on a far humbler reality possibly related to the Pleiades as a travelling asterism rather than a fixed or circumpolar star.

And this is a vital factor in the final analysis of Odysseus' condition. The palace on Ithaka with its rooted tree as a World Axis, the perfect marriage reflecting the harmonious conjoining of male and female which is the very model of the creative emanation from the Centre, the defeat of evil and the restitution of order which prevents the uprooting of the tree and the onset of cosmic disaster, are all described through the medium of human life and a truthfulness in characterisation which is founded on *perceptible reality*. We remember how Odysseus rejected the many offers of fame and immortality presented to him by 'southerly' Kalypso and 'northerly' Circe. Instead, by rejecting both the seductive omniscience offered by the 'northerly' Sirens and the facile escape from knowledge available in the 'southerly' land of the Lotus Eaters, it was through faithful remembrance of his own island and his own wife that he finally sailed into the only harbour he had ever hoped to gain.

Here at last we come to those ancient doctrines which place the true mystic Centre within the heart of man and woman.

Home and Heart

What can this resolution mean on the metaphysical scale of things? Ithaka is very like Scheria, but it experiences strife among men unknown to its counterpart. Odysseus loves his island, but admires Scheria; he loves his wife, but admires Nausikaa. His palace and his harbour may not be so grand but they contain tokens of power (the olive tree bed) and self-transformation (the Cave of the Nymphs) which have no equivalent on the other island. Ithaka in all important respects is the centre of Odysseus' being and no other centre, not even Scheria, represents for him the Centre as a mystical expression of higher values. He has returned to his own *omphalos*, and this event is configured in part by the symbolism of the storeroom and the bedchamber, but particularly by means of extensive punning references to his greed (essentially, 'the longing for the navel-centre') and the demands of his belly, which is of course marked by his own navel. The placing of bread begged from the diners in the rough pouch hung about his body is a further metaphor of fulfilment in which may be detected the punning word play of a master poet.

So, the Odyssean self has at last found the Self, and the completeness of the renewal of his marriage to Penelope underscores the complete harmony of body and soul. But has he found Elysium, an Island of the Blessed? Apparently not, for the prophecy has foretold that death will indeed come to him, from the sea. There is another kind of immortality however, and this presumes the discovery of the immortal paradise in

one's own heart. Elixirs and magical plants are all very well in their way, but they and their seekers regularly fail in the quest for such artificial, magical means to prolong life. (So the Holy Grail ever remains elusive and the life-giving plant is frequently lost). That is not to say that the search is futile: it is a question of "seek and ye shall find". The search is a prelude to the discovery, for true transformation is gained by one's own indefatigable pursuit of knowledge, or virtue, or Otherworldliness… call it what one will, it does not lie without, but within the individual. And the heart is traditionally the place where the strongest and purest of our emotions are embedded.

Of the two selves, the physical (instinctive and mortal) and the spiritual (unattached to time or space) it is the latter, namely a state of detachment from earthly ties, which should be the desired goal of the religious man. This knowledge is currently owed to a master of ancient iconography who has set out in the course of an essay on the metaphysics of 'selfless-ness', a doctrine he names "Self- Naughting".[4] Coomaraswamy has found proof of consistent doctrines of self-denial in Arabic Sufism, Judaism and Christianity, in the early Greek philosophy of Plato as well as, and predominantly, in the earliest Hindu literature. We have already had occasion to consider Odysseus the 'No-Man' as an unwitting model of the 'seeker after knowledge' of which he is, at the stage of his sojourn with Polyphemos, no more than a graceless neophyte. Nevertheless from the evidence of self-fulfilment presented in the closing stages of the Epic, this present exploration of Homer's 'Islands in the Sky' could just as easily have been described in terms of a search for the greater, self-less Self which is characterised by knowledge of the timeless, place-less *good*, and persistence in the search for it. That Odysseus completed his *nostos* and achieved reunion with Penelope (as wisdom) is all that we need to know about the success of his initiatory voyage. The search for the Centre which is ostensibly the search for Ithaka in the centre of the sky is no more than a concrete image clothing a search for the centre of one's own being, conventionally found in one's heart, at the centre of our bodies, where man's nobler instincts are thought (symbolically) to lodge.

In another Homeric context, it is the Cave of the Nymphs, the 'cave of two paths' which is precisely the 'heart', 'of two caves' into which the blood flows, is purified, and emerges, strengthened. Elsewhere in related cultures it is the Holy Grail, the Lotus, the hub of the wheel, the centre of the mystic rose or the divinely-connected cosmic city. Each of these configures the point where the individual makes contact with the universal, at the centre of *all* things, where the two finally become one in the spiritual equivalent of the Heart of the Sun.[5] The voyage in quest of the

Sun comes to an end when inner and outer hearts meet and recognise each other, a time-stopping event which in our Epic finds poetic expression in the reunion of Odysseus and his wife Penelope. *Hieros gamos*, perhaps; but the ritual marriage is not an end in itself, concerned as it is with replicating the original condition in which the One is re-created out of Two, by a reversal of the cosmogonic order.

The master and mistress of Ithaka may not have had such high intentions in mind at the moment of their final reunion in the cosmically-aligned marriage bed, but the poet surely did, and with epic grace and high drama he has allowed the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope to serve as the ultimate expression of his hero's spiritual *nostos*.

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ANET: *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. (ed.) James B. Pritchard.

BCE: Before Christian Era; CE-Christian Era.

A: Primary Texts

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NOTES

Chapter One

[1] Nagy (1990b).
[2] Jung (1964).
[3] Trigger (2003) pp. 445-470. Eliade (1989).
[4] Bakker (2006). Eliade (1989) pp. 387ff. Soles (1995).
[5] Van Gennep (1960).
[6] Planinc (2003) pp. 13ff.
[7] Plato, *Phaedo* 107D-115A.
[8] De Santillana, von Dechend (1977). p. 187.
[9] Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Pisces, Libra, Scorpio, Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces.
[10] Stanford (1959) vol. 1. p. 401, ad loc.; Marinatos (2009).
[11] Griffiths (1991) pp. 247ff.
[12] Faulkner (1969) p. 190. Griffiths (1991) p. 164.
[13] Shushan (2009) p. 54.
[14] Allen (2005) pp. 53-69.
[15] Shushan (2009) pp. 53-69.
[16] *Pyramid Text*, 1216.
[17] Edmonds (2004) p. 32.
[18] *Works and Days*, 109-202.
[19] 515-450 BCE. Kirk, Raven, Schofield (1983) pp. 242-244.
[20] Pellikan-Engel (1978).
[21] Diels and Krantz (1934). 31B 112.4.
[22] Woodberry (1966).
[23] De Santillana, von Dechend (1977). pp. 56-75; 149-164.
[24] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 721-725.
[25] Hesiod, *Works and Days*,108-122.
[26] Kirk, Raven, Schofield (1983) § 296. p. 249f.
[27] Aristotle, *Meteorologia,* A 986A2.
[28] Kirk, Raven, Schofield (1983) § 296. p. 249f.
[29] Ibid. § 306.p. 258.
[30] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 748-745.
[31] Sidharth (1999).
[32] From c. 6th. century BCE.
[33] *Rg Veda*, 10. 14.
[34] *Satapatha Brahmana.*

[35] Trans. Sanders (1971) pp. 135-136.
[36] Trans. George (1991).
[37] Tablet IX, 38ff.
[38] Tablet X, 80ff.

Chapter Two

[1] Sullivan (1996) pp. 37, 51, 55.
[2] *Iliad* 15, 191.
[3] Jenkins (2002) p. 92.
[4] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 745.
[5] Ibid. 124; 726-729.
[6] Ibid. p. 124; 726-729.
[7] Thompson (1918).
[8] Potentially 4 cardinal points + 4 intercardinal + 4 others to indicate the third dimension.
[9] Coomaraswamy (1977) pp. 430f.
[10] Perry (1991); Naydler (1996); Guénon (2004; 1991).
[11] *Midrash Tanhuma, Kedoshim* 10.
[12] Wyatt (2001) pp. 159-182; flood stories, pp. 121-146.
[13] De Santillana, von Dechend (1977) p. 220.
[14] Guénon (2001) pp. 62ff.
[15] Ibid. pp. 107f.
[16] Babylonian World Map 7th. -6th. C. BCE. British Museum ANE 92687. Unger (1937) p. 2.
[17] Wyatt (2001) p. 82.
[18] Ibid. p. 81f.

Chapter Three

[1] *H.H.to Dionysos*, trans. Cashford. no. 7, 27ff. p. 100. Warren (1985).
[2] Unless Homer was the author of the *Epigonoi*, says Herodotus (4, 32).
[3] Gantz (1993) pp. 306, 410; Bridgman (2005).
[4] Pindar, *Olympian III,* 12ff.; Callimachos, *Delian* 4, 281; Pausanias, 5.7.8.
[5] Diodorus Siculus, *Library*, 2, 47. 1-6.
[6] Schroeder (1905) and Daebritz (1914) also held this opinion.
[7] Srinivasan (1978) pp. 209-215.
[8] Eliade (1987) 'Mountain'. vol. 10. pp. 130-147.
[9] *Atharva Veda*, 10.7.34.
[10] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 338ff.
[11] *Srimad Bhagavitam*. Canto 5.17. 1-6.
[12] Herodotus, 4. 32-36.

[13] De Santillana, von Dechend (1977) pp. 60, 61: African and Asian illustrations of 'hour glass' forms of cosmic mountains, with rotating internal motion.
[14] *Iliad* 15, 184ff.; *Odyssey* 6, 43ff.
[15] Fehling (1989). p. 187.
[16] Ibid. p.13ff.
[17] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 201.
[18] Herodotus*, Histories*, 4, 32-36.
[19] Ps.-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 2, 119.
[20] Hardie (1983).
[21] Hippocrates of Cos, *Air, Water and Places*, §19.
[22] Pliny the Elder, 6, 34.
[23] Ibid. 4, 88ff.
[24] De Santillana, von Dechend (1977) pp. 58f., 142ff.
[25] Statius, *Thebaid*, 1. 694ff.
[26] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, 2. 47. 1 – 6.
[27] Bridgman (2005).
[28] Pausanias 10.5.7.
[29] Bridgman (2005) 41f.
[30] At Eretria, an Apolline sanctuary lying on the god's legendary aerial route from the north contained a 'Daphnephoreum' of an *omphalos*-like character, which may have been matched at Delos.
[31] Bridgman (2005) p. 35.
[32] Thucydides, 1. 8, 3.104; Diodorus Siculus, 12. 58. 7.
[33] Pindar, *Paean*, frag. 33d.
[34] *Homeric Hymn to Apollo.*
[35] Pindar, *Olympian Ode III*. 12ff.
[36] Egypt, China, Babylon, Persia, Rome.
[37] Frothingham (1917) p. 420, et passim.
[38] Psalm 48, 1f.
[39] Job 37, 22.
[40] *Odyssey* 2, 146-167 (a good omen for Ithaka); 15, 160-165; 15, 525-534.
[41] Goodison (2001); Blomberg and Henriksson (2003).
[42] Peatfield (1987).
[43] Pindar, *Olympian Ode II,* 56-70.
[44] *Rg Veda* 2, 43, 1: "here on the right sing forth chanters of hymns of praise, even the winged birds that in due season speak".
[45] Frothingham (1917) p. 434.
[46] *Hiranyakecin* 1, 6, 14. (*Grihja Sutras*).
[47] *Satapatha Brahmana.*

Chapter Four

[1] Gordon (1979).
[2] Tsumura (1981).

[3] Neiman (1969).
[4] Gaisford (1848).
[5] Coomaraswamy (1977) vol. 2. p. 224.
[6] As on the Shield of Achilleus and in the *Theogony* of Hesiod, 242.
[7] Ashmole (1967) p. 4.
[8] Wyatt (2001) p. 133.
[9] Griffith (1997).
[10] Faulkner (1985) p. 90.
[11] Langdon (1931) p. 291.
[12] Coomaraswamy (1977) pp. 398-407. n. 11. p. 405. Purce (1992).
[13] Kramrisch (1975) pp. 246, 248.
[14] Ibid. pp. 240f.
[15] Ibid. p. 240.
[16] *Hymn to Okeanos*, 83. 7. Quandt (1973) p. 55.
[17] De Santillana, von Dechend (1977) p. 191.
[18] Hesiod, *Theogony,* 337ff.
[19] Nagy (1990a).
[20] Griffith (2002).
[21] Plato, *Republic*, 10, 614-621.
[22] Naydler (1996) p. 237.
[23] Wyatt (2001) pp. 193f.
[24] *Spells* 1455, 1456.
[25] Eliade (1996) pp. 99-102.

Chapter Five

[1] Woodring (2006).
[2] Evans (1901). On Yggdrasil, Eliade (1996) pp. 265, 276-278, 324, 327.
[3] Pausanias, 3.19.20.
[4] Gantz (1993) p. 343.
[5] Easterling (1989).
[6] Sophocles, *Elektra*, 417-423. On hearths, Hestia, and kingly power, Nagy (1990c).
[7] Irwin (1982).
[8] Eliade (1989) pp. 168-176.
[9] Ibid. pp. 260-265.
[10] Aristophanes, *Birds*, 177-187.
[11] Hummel, La Fleur (1971) pp. 204-210.
[12] Eliade (1987).
[13] 1, 330-335; 18, 206-213; 21, 63-66.
[14] E.g. 'Master (or Mistress) of the Animals'; Crucifixion scenes (duplication of thieves, etc.; heraldic coats of arms; Lion Gate of Mycenae.
[15] Evans (1901).
[16] Bakker (2001) p. 346.
[17] Nagler, in Schein (1996) pp. 152ff.; 157, note 88.

[18] Butterworth (1970) p. 1f.
[19] Wilkinson (1992) p. 116f. Illustrations 3, 4.
[20] Eliade (1959) p. 43.
[21] Wilkinson (1994).
[22] Wilkinson (1992) p. 132, illustration 1; p. 134, illustrations 1-5.

Chapter Six

[1] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act III, scene 1.
[2] Clark (1986).
[3] Eck (1981).
[4] Goldman (1966) p. 73.
[5] Ibid. p. 71, figure 1.
[6] E.g. at the west wall of the palace of Knossos, Crete, and the West House on Santorini. Hägg (1987) p. 132.
[7] Coomaraswamy (1997) pp. 192-241.
[8] *Genesis* 28, 10-19; *Psalm* 78, 23f.
[9] Cf.18, 385f. where the gates of the house of Odysseus might close (like the clashing rocks) on the cowardly, mocking Eurymachos.
[10] Parmenides, *Proem* 10-21. Kirk, Raven, Schofield (1983) pp. 242ff.
[11] Plato, *Republic* 7, 514 A, B.
[12] Magnien (1950) pp. 290f.
[13] Pausanias, 9. 39. 4.
[14] Gantz (1993) vol. 1, p. 165. (1977) p. 279.
[15] (1977) p. 279. The source is unknown.
[16] De Santillana, von Dechend (1977) pp. 56-75; 63; 219; 297; 323.
[17] *Gilgamesh*, tablet IX. 38-41. Standard version.
[18] Ibid. tablet IV. 9-11. From Sivar.
[19] Ibid. tablet IX. 39; 81-83.
[20] West (1997).
[21] Cook (1940) vol. 3. *Zeus,* p. 976; Coomaraswamy (1947) *Symplegades.*
[22] Coomaraswamy (1947) p. 471f.
[23] *Kausitaki Brahmana*, II. 9.
[24] *Jaiminiya Upanisad Brahmana*, I. 3, 5-6. Coomaraswamy (1997) p. 10.
[25] Guénon (1995) pp. 71-74.
[26] Wheatley (1971).
[27] Rykwert (1988) p. 125f.
[28] *Matthew*, 7, 7.
[29] Plato, *Republic*, 509B.
[30] Ibid. 620 C.
[31] Cf. *Phaedrus*, 230D-E.

Chapter Seven

[1] Rappenglück (2002). pp. 270-276.
[2] Barnhart (2003) p. 6. The K'an Cross. Freidel et al. (1993) pp. 94, 96, 103, 418, 423, 431. Figs. 2:21, 2:22, p. 86.
[3] Sullivan (1996) pp. 52, 66.
[4] It is approximately 1,360 years since this fact held good, the change being the result of Precession.
[5] NB: the birth of Aphrodite from a 'sea' of foaming waters.
[6] Ps.-Eratosthenes, *Katasterismoi,* 43. c. 2nd century BCE-1st century CE. Condos (1997) pp. 109f.
[7] For the Maya also, the sacred Vilcamayu river is 'the Milky Way on Earth' and the Vilcanota fulfils the same function for the Incans of Peru.
[8] Maravelia (2003) pp. 5-16, 109f.
[9] Piankoff (1931) pp. 57-61.
[10] Chapman (2002) p. 61. Wells (1996) pp. 30f. Figs. 8-10.
[11] *Iliad* 17, 547-551; 11, 181-210; 24, 143-188, etc.
[12] E.g. The Rainbow Serpent of Australian Aborigines.
[13] Guénon (1995) pp. 263-266.
[14] Jain Arts (see bibliography).
[15] D.L.Coomaraswamy (1944-5).
[16] Jenkins (2002) pp. 74-85.
[17] Coomaraswamy (2004). p. 33. fig. 18. Hartner (1938).
[18] Coomaraswamy (2004) p. 1.
[19] Ibid. figs. 1, 15, 16, 18.
[20] Ibid. pp. 29-63.
[21] Hartner (1938). Langdon (1931).
[22] Ibid. pp. 60f. fig. 62.
[23] Jenkins (2002) pp. 74-85; (1998) p. 54, diagram 14.
[24] Quoted in Mackenzie (1964) p. 515. Existing texts of this Zoroastrian compendium of astrological lore are relatively late (9th.-15th centuries CE) but the material is considerably more ancient.

Chapter Eight

[1] Eck (1981).
[2] Ibid.
[3] Collins (2006).
[4] Ibid. p. 170.
[5] Collins (2006) p. 80.
[6] Wyatt (2001) p.150.
[7] Naydler (1996) p. 256.
[8] Wyatt (2001) p. 227.
[9] Ibid. 6 (6), p. 166.

[10] Gantz (1993) vol. 1. pp. 318-323.
[11] Evans (1925) pp. 48-53.
[12] Ibid. p. 50. Quoting the Papyrus of Nebhobit.
[13] Collins (2006) p. 190.
[14] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 156-218.
[15] Ibid. 453-500.
[16] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 144.

Chapter Nine

[1] Quotation on frontispiece.
[2] Kirk, Raven, Schofield (1983) p. 14.
[3] Watanabe (1983) pp. 172f. fig. 2.
[4] Dante, *Paradiso*, 33. 145.
[5] Guénon (2001) pp. 122-127.
[6] Trans. Cashford pp. 5-26.
[7] Ibid. lines 417-424, p. 23.
[8] Coomaraswamy (1997) pp. 6-61.
[9] *Jaiminiya Upanishad*, 1. 6. 1.
[10] Coomaraswamy (2001) pp. 8-29.
[11] De Santillana, von Dechend (1977), ch. 17, pp. 230-241.
[12] Emboden (1981).
[13] Eliade (1963).
[14] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 32, 38.
[15] Laks and Most (1997).
[16] Edmonds (2011) pp.15-51, 128.
[17] Davidson (1988) p. 25f.
[18] *Iliad* 14, 231.
[19] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 754-759.
[20] The verb 'diaphaino', to 'show through', and 'phainesthai', denoting a shining revelation, belong to the language of divine epiphany. Prier (1989) p. 55f., 231; 234; 251; 308; 328.
[21] *Mahabharata*, XVII-XIX.
[22] Stanford (1947) commentary on *Odyssey* 10, 2.
[23] *Rg Veda,* 5. 63, 2-5.
[24] Eliade (1996) pp. 66-72.
[25] The rage of Aiolos: 10, 72-75; Varuna: *Rg Veda*, I. 25, 2: "thy fierce anger when displeased".
[26] Eliade (1991) pp. 97f. Ibid. pp. 110ff.
[27] Coomaraswamy (1997) p. 7.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 752-754.
[30] Kirk, Raven, Schofield (1983) pp. 242ff.

[31] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 738f.

Chapter Ten

[1] *Genesis*, 28, 12.
[2] Eliade (1996) pp. 102f.
[3] Shushan (2009) pp. 157-160, et passim.
[4] *Theogony*, 807-811.
[5] *Bilgamesh and the Netherworld*. Tablet 12. (ed.) George, pp. 175-195.
[6] E.g. the third, fourth and sixth hours of the *Book of Pylons.*
[7] Pépin (1982).
[8] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 767-780.
[9] Shushan (2009) pp. 158f.
[10] Van Gennep (1977) pp. 15f.
[11] *Iliad* 6, 46; 23, 71, 74; 8, 367; 9, 312, "doorways of Death"; 13, 315, "Hades of the Gates"; *Odyssey* 11, 277; 14, 156.
[12] The White Island as burial place of Achilleus: Pausanias, 3. 19. 11.
[13] *Divina Commedia: Paradiso*, 13, 11f.
[14] Eliot, *Four Quartets: Burnt Norton*, line 1.
[15] Coomaraswamy (1977) p. 223f.; *Kha.*
[16] *Isaiah*, 28, 14-18.
[17] Nagy (1999) pp. 224, et passim.
[18] Ibid. p. 225.
[19] Eliade (1987) vol. 15. pp. 99-107.
[20] Cook (1940) vol. 3. pp. 432-439.
[21] Mackie (1999).
[22] Pindar, *Olympian I*, 90-93.
[23] Pausanias, 5. 7.6.
[24] Burkert (1983) pp. 93-103. Quinlan (2009).
[25] Pausanias, 5. 13, 1-3.
[26] Jenkins (1998) p. 51.
[27] Kelley (1989).

Chapter Eleven

[1] Griffith (2002).
[2] Rohde (1966) pp. 63, 75f.
[3] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 166-172.
[4] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 4-13.
[5] E.g. Red figure stamnos vase. 480-460 BCE. British Museum. Beazley Archive 202628.
[6] Merry-Riddell (1886) ad loc. Emphasis added.
[7] *Gilgamesh*, tablet X, standard version, lines 158-179.

[8] Budge (1960) chapter 175.
[9] Cook, *Zeus III*, appendix P, 'Floating Islands', pp. 975-1016. Coomaraswamy (1947).
[10] Erebos as Underworld: Hesiod, *Theogony*, 514ff., 669ff. ("beneath the earth").
[11] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 770f.
[12] Heraklion Museum.
[13] Gregoriades (2009).
[14] Coomaraswamy (1997) pp. 6-71.
[15] *Khandogya Upanishad*, viii. 6. 5.
[16] Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*, 922-925.
[17] Coomaraswamy (1997) p. 47. Figure 11: Solar Tree (*asvattha, ficus religiosa*).
[18] Parpola (2005) p. 241.
[19] Horowitz (1998).
[20] Plato, *Timaeus*, 90. 2. 66.
[21] Davidson (1998) p. 186. De Santillana, von Dechend (1977), chap. xiv. pp. 204-212.

Chapter Twelve

[1] Nagler (1996) p. 143.
[2] Gantz (1993) vol. I. p. 219: Kalypso as a name for Oceanic nymphs; Kalypso as a daughter of Atlas and Pleione; the same parentage is given to the Pleiades (ibid. p. 213).
[3] Nagler (1996). p. 146.
[4] *Gilgamesh*, trans. George p. 124f. Si iii. 21-27, from a damaged tablet, reportedly from Sippar.
[5] Davidson (1988) p. 210.
[6] Tablet XI, 287-290. trans. George, p. 98.
[7] In the translation by Robert Temple (1991) tablet X, 21f.
[8] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 116-121.
[9] Guénon (2001) p. 76.
[10] Ibid. p. 77.
[11] Coomaraswamy (1997) pp. 7f. *Bhagavad Gita*, vii. 7.
[12] 'Greek Women Weaving.' Attic black-figured jug, c.550 BCE, attributed to the Amasis Painter. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Fletcher Fund, 1931.
[13] Singer et al. (1954) p. 187.
[14] Guénon (1995) pp. 249-256. Coomaraswamy (1997) pp. 40, n. 189, 7f., 39f., 186f.
[15] De Santillana, von Dechend (1977) pp. 62f.
[16] Cf. Four 'Sons of Horus'.
[17] Nagler (1996) p. 145.
[18] Powell (date unknown).
[19] Ulansey (1989) p. 112ff.
[20] Beck (2004).

[21] Guénon (1995) pp. 156-162.
[22] Ibid. p. 157.
[23] c. 233-301 CE.
[24] c. 400 CE.
[25] Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*. Bk. 1.12, 1-14.
[26] Cf. *Odyssey* 24, 12: "[the souls] passed the gates of Helios the Sun".
[27] Guénon (1995) p. 159.
[28] Porphyry, *De antro,* chap. 24. Arethusa edition, 1969, emending previous texts.
[29] Cook (1940) vol. 3. pp. 432-434.
[30] Schwartz (1975) suggests '*caut*', 'youth', and '*pat*', 'opposite' or 'against' = 'youth and counter-youth'. 'Youth and age' can be either, or both, Sun-ages, or spirit-ages.
[31] Beck (2004) pp. 133-143a.
[32] Ibid (2004d). Ibid. p. 274d.
[33] Ulansey (1989) pp. 62ff.
[34] Ibid. pp.112ff.
[35] Waites (1919).
[36] Jasper signet ring from Crete. Reproduced in Evans (1935) *Palace of Minos.* vol. IV. p. 584. Fig. 573.
[37] Godwin (1981) p. 106.
[38] Statius, *Thebiad*, 1. 719. Cumont (1896-1899). pp. 46-49.
[39] Servius, *ad Georg*. 1. 34.
[40] Plutarch, *De genio Socratis.*
[41] Ibid. 943ff.
[42] Beck (2004b) pp. 154ff.
[43] Porphyry, *De antro* 29, Arethusa edition.
[44] Plato, *Timaeus*, 36b-c.

Chapter Thirteen

[1] Eliade (1979) pp. 441f. 'An Eskimo Shaman Descends to the Bottom of the Ocean.' p. 36.
[2] Krupp (1991) pp. 257f.
[3] Langdon (1964) p. 175.
[4] Nagy (1990a) pp. 224 et passim.
[5] Ibid. p. 225.
[6] Page (1962) *PMG*. fragment 1.49.
[7] Guénon (1995) p. 250.
[8] *Rg Veda*, 5. 40. 5.
[9] The scorpion's sting, myth tells, eventually caused the death of the archer of the north.
[10] De Santillana, von Dechend (1977) pp. 165-178.
[11] Hesiod, *Theogony,* 804.
[12] De Santillana, von Dechend (1977) pp. 205f.

[13] Plato, *Republic*, 10, 614-621. 'Myth of Er'.
[14] On Thrinakia, the skins of cattle refuse to die (12, 394ff.); the herald Medon escapes death by hiding under an oxhide, "freshly skinned" (22, 363); and in both the Iliad and the Odyssey, shields, doors and gates commonly "bellow" as if alive. Burkert (1983) p. 16, on regenerative functions of the bull hide.
[15] Guénon (1995) pp. 159-162.
[16] Ibid. p. 159.
[17] *Bhagavad Gita*, 24. 8; 8, 26.
[18] Frame (1978).
[19] Beck (2004d) p. 289.
[20] Ibid. p. 291.
[21] Freidel et al. (1993) pp. 79ff.

Chapter Fourteen

[1] T. S. Eliot: *Four Quartets, Burnt Norton.*
[2] *Khandogya Upanishad,* 8. 6. 5.
[3] *Satapatha Brahman*, 10. 5. 1. 4. *Rg Veda*, 10. 121. 2.
[4] Guénon (1995) p. 251.
[5] Ibid. pp. 237-239; 249-256.
[6] Allen (1963) pp. 64-75.
[7] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 745f. Coomaraswamy (1944) p. 111, note 3, life ('be here' and death ('go there').
[8] *II Kings* 2, verses 1, 11.
[9] *1, Enoch*, 17.1-8; 1,11-4. Quoted by Wyatt (2001) pp. 202f.
[10] *Kalevala*, poem 10.
[11] Newton (1984).
[12] Smith (1997) pp. 51ff. *Genesis*, 37: 31-33.
[13] Guénon (1995) pp. 108f.
[14] Ibid. p.111.
[15] Dolphin, crab and octopus are all capable of brief survival out of water.
[16] Wyatt (2001) pp. 85ff.; p. 95 et passim.
[17] Ibid. pp. 95-146, on water and world beginnings.
[18] Ibid. p. 242. Also known as the *Kala-mukha, kirti-mukha*, or in China, the *T'ao t'ieh.*
[19] Coomaraswamy (1993).
[20] *Rg Veda*, 9. 113. 8.
[21] Jenkins (2002a).
[22] Jenkins (2002) pp. 164-175.
[23] *Mahabharata,* vol. 2. VI: 7: 2-14.
[24] Yetts (1919) pp. 39-40.
[25] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* 239-236. trans. Cashford, p. 15.
[26] Quoted by Wyatt (2001) pp. 152f. from ANET 38. Cf. *Isaiah*, 11, 6-9: "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain".

[27] Pindar, *Pythian Ode 10*, 27.
[28] Pausanias, 8, 38. 7.
[29] Fowler (1947) pp. 271ff.
[30] Kerényi (1975) pp. 33f.
[31] Warren (1885) p. 135 n. 2.
[32] Reichel-Dolmatoff (1982) p. 167.
[33] *Iliad* 16, 141-144; 22, 317.
[34] *Iliad* 22, 317.
[35] Coomaraswamy (1977). pp. 198-208.
[36] Ibid. p. 200, quoting *Taittiriya Samhita,* 3.1.9.
[37] Ibid p. 201.
[38] Ibid. p. 202, quoting *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3. 5.
[39] Stanley (1993) pp. 10.
[40] Wyatt (2001) p. 115, on the king as national deity; p. 117, on the king ruling over the four quarters of the world.
[41] The tyrants and criminals in Plato's *Myth of Er* are terrified by the roar that issues from the mouth of the cavern; but the virtuous ascend with great joy when there was silence. *Republic*, Bk. 10, 614-621.
[42] Thompson (1966).
[43] Coomaraswamy (1997) pp. 13-15.
[44] *Jaiminiya Upanishad Brahmana*, 3, 14, 1-5.
[45] Edmonds (2004) pp. 64f.
[46] *Gilgamesh*, trans. George (1999) tablet XI, lines 203-206.
[47] Ibid. lines 259-270.
[48] Ibid. lines 295f.
[49] Ibid. lines 303-307.
[50] Scodel (1982).
[51] De Santillana, von Dechend (1977) p. 57.
[52] Ibid. p. 316.
[53] White (2007) p. 221.
[54] Lyle (1984).
[55] Prier (1989) pp. 94f. compares this chariot with the chariot of Parmenides, the vehicle of another soul journey.
[56] The wagon of Priam serves a similar function in respect of the soul of Hector. *Iliad* 24, 269, 273.
[57] The use of *polos* in other contexts for the tall headdress of goddesses is interesting: could it be their link to the heavens?
[58] Autenrieth (1958) p. 128, cut no. 45; p. 176, cut no. 78.
[59] E.g. on the ceiling of the tomb of Senmut.

Chapter Fifteen

[1] Benton (1939).
[2] Bittlestone (2005) lists published theories. Also (2004).
[3] On astronomical fire: De Santillana, von Dechend (1977) pp. 140,159, 321.

Chapter Sixteen

[1] *The Song of Grotti*, from the *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sterluson. Quoted by Worthen (1991) pp. 42f.
[2] Just like the sceptre which continues to flourish even after being cut from the tree.
[3] *Bilgamesh and the Netherworld*. trans. George, pp. 179-182.
[4] Irwin (1982).
[5] Kak (1994).
[6] Plato, *Timaeus*, 8. 40.
[7] Plato, *Critias*, 22, 23.
[8] Sidharth (1999).
[9] McEvilley (2002) pp. 78f.
[10] Philpot (1879) p. 123.
[11] Sayce (1887) p. 385. trans. of Akkadian poem c. 3,500 BCE.
[12] *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. p. 690.
[13] Hardie (1963). p. 223, 456.
[14] *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. p. 60.
[15] *Homeric Hymn to Hestia*, trans. Cashford (2003) p. 138f.
[16] Laoupi (2006) pp. 6, 11.
[17] Penrose (1893).
[18] Blomberg et al. (2003): recent research into ancient alignments.
[19] Callimachus, *Hymns* 401, quoting Aratus' *Phaenomena*, 257f.
[20] Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 221-223.
[21] Harva (1959) p. 129.
[22] Jenkins (1998) pp. 69-80. 468 Theophrastos, *On Signs*, 6-7.
[23] Allen (1963) 'Pleiades'.
[24] Gantz (1993) pp. 212-219 gives the full ancestry and etymologies.
[25] Trans. Evelyn-White (1914).
[26] Ashfaque (1989) seal M 2430.
[27] Behari (2003). pp. 177f.
[28] A fragment preserved by Antigonus of Carystus. Page (1962) no. 26. frag. 26.
[29] Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, 542B, 4ff.
[30] Apollonius, *Argonautica*, 1. 1084ff.
[31] Gresseth (1964) pp. 93-98.
[32] Bakker (2001) domestic *axis* linked with cosmic *axis*: p. 344, note 42; p. 345, note 51; p. 346, note 54.
[33] Pindar, *Olympian Ode II*, 81f.

[34] Gaster (1950) pp. 15ff.
[35] Mädler (1846).

Chapter Seventeen

[1] Gantz (1993) vol. I. pp. 213f.; 271ff.
[2] Orion in the *Odyssey*: 5, 121-24; 11, 572-575.
[3] Starbuck (2006).
[4] MacGillivray (2000).
[5] Quoted by De Santillana, von Dechend (1977) p. 325 without source.
[6] Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Act 1, scene 5. v. 185.
[7] Sadowski (1987) pp. 296f.
[8] De Santillana, von Dechend (1977) pp. 165-178.
[9] Ibid. p. 177.
[10] Trans. George p. 70.
[11] Temple (1991) p. 44. notes 3, 4, mentions the formulaic nature of the description of Orion's weapons.
[12] Trans. George p. 47. Ischali version.
[13] Ulansey (1989). pp. 76-89. Beck (2004d) p. 279.
[14] Coomaraswamy (1997): Vedic stringing of beads as a "thread-spirit doctrine", "*sutratman*". pp. 7f., 39f., 186f. Cf. *Iliad* 8, 19, the golden cord.
[15] Murray (1924) p. 211.
[16] Thomson (1943) p. 53.
[17] Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1931) p. 29.
[18] Austin (1975) pp. 246f.
[19] Heraclitus, *Quaestiones Homericae*, § 75.
[20] Plutarch, *De facie in orbe lunae,* § 19; and *De vitae et poesi Homeri,* §108.
[21] Richer (1994) p. xl.
[22] De Santillana, von Dechend (1977) pp. 213-224.

Chapter Eighteen

[1] Austin (1975) p. 282. note 16.
[2] Eliade (1996) p. 241.
[3] Coomaraswamy (1977) p. 93.
[4] Coomaraswamy (1977) p. 93.
[5] Guénon (1995) p. 307.

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